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BARON DE MARBOT'S MEMOIRS

VOL. II.

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From a portrait by Saint. Heliog Dujardin.

Lieut. General
BARON de MARBOT.
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THE MEMOIRS

OF

BARON DE MARBOT

LATE

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL IN THE FRENCH ARMY

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

ARTHUR JOHN BUTLER

Late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WITH PORTRAIT AND MAPS

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PORTRAIT AND MAPS IN VOLUME II.

LIEUT.-GENERAL BARON DE MARBOT, 1840 . . . . *Frontispiece*

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THE MEMOIRS

OF THE

BARON DE MARBOT

CHAPTER I

By the end of June I was well enough to join Masséna's headquarters on the isle of Lobau, and was greeted in friendly fashion by my new comrades. The staff was numerous, and contained several officers of distinction. Before resuming my tale of the campaign of 1809 I should like to make you acquainted with one of them who played an important part in the events preceding the battle of Wagram—Colonel de Sainte-Croix.

Charles d'Escorches de Sainte-Croix, son of the marquis of that name, once Louis XVI.'s ambassador to the Porte, was in all respects a most remarkable man. His military career was short enough, but of wonderful brilliancy. His family and mine were connected, and we were most intimate friends; indeed, the desire of serving with him had been a strong inducement to me to accept Masséna's proposal. Keen as was Sainte-Croix's natural love of war, it was late before he could gratify it, since he was destined for diplomacy, and all through the Peace of Amiens was employed under Talleyrand in the Foreign Office. When the campaign of 1805 opened he was twenty-three, and therefore too old to enter the *École Militaire*, so that but for a lucky circumstance he might never have entered the army.

After Austerlitz Napoleon formed from the prisoners there

taken two foreign regiments for the French service. These not being governed by the same regulations as the national forces, he was able to officer them as he pleased, appointing even to field rank men who had had no military experience, but belonging to good families, and showing a zeal for the service. By this abnormal system of promotion Napoleon got the benefit of attaching to himself some hundred and fifty young men of education and fortune who otherwise would have been corrupted by a slothful life at Paris. The first foreign regiment was commanded by the nephew of the famous La Tour d'Auvergne; the second, by a great German noble, the Prince of Eisenburg; and they were known by the names of their chiefs. They were organised on the model of the foreign regiments in the French service before the Revolution, and as the Foreign Minister had always been responsible for the levying of these troops, Napoleon ordered Talleyrand to search the archives for precedents. Knowing young Sainte-Croix's military tastes, the Minister assigned the work to him, and, in addition to tracing the history of the old regiments, he proposed modifications to suit the altered conditions. Struck with the good sense displayed in this scheme, and knowing the author's desire to serve in the new corps, the Emperor appointed him first major, and, soon after, lieutenant-colonel in the La Tour d'Auvergne Regiment. It was a great favour, as the Emperor had never seen Sainte-Croix; but it went near to spoil his prospects at the outset.

A M. de M——, cousin to the Emperor, had hoped for the rank of lieutenant-colonel, but only got that of major. Hurt in his vanity, he sought a quarrel with Sainte-Croix on a frivolous pretext. As he was a first-rate performer with every kind of weapon, his friends were sure of his victory, and escorted him in a cavalcade to the Bois de Boulogne; but only one accompanied him to the spot where his adversary, with one second, awaited him. They fought with pistols, and M. de M—— received a bullet in the breast which laid him dead; upon which, his second, instead of going to fetch help, and thinking only of the consequences which this tragic end of a relation of the Emperor might entail on himself, fled

through the wood and far away from Paris, without returning for his horse or informing the dead man's friends. Sainte-Croix and his friends also returned to the city, and the body was left alone on the ground. Meanwhile, those who were awaiting M. de M——'s return, hearing the shots but seeing no more of him, went into the wood, and found the poor young man's body. It happened that in falling he had fractured his skull on a hard stump, and when his friends, after examining the wound in the breast, saw another in the head, they thought that Sainte-Croix, after wounding his opponent with a bullet from his pistol, had finished him by smashing his skull with the butt. This seemed to explain the disappearance of the dead man's second, on the supposition that he lacked either strength or courage to prevent the assassination. With this notion in their minds, they hastened to Saint-Cloud, and imparted it to the Empress, who went to the Emperor demanding justice. An order was given to arrest Sainte-Croix, and, as he had in no way concealed himself, he was locked up. Doubtless he would have lain in prison while a long inquiry was held had not Fouché, a family friend, being sure that he would not have committed such a crime, made an active search for the missing second. Being found and brought to Paris, he honestly reported what had happened, and further, the officials charged with the inquiry discovered near the corpse a stump of a root stained with blood, and having hair adhering to it. Sainte-Croix's innocence was admitted; he was set free, and went to join his regiment in Italy.

M. de La Tour d'Auvergne was an estimable man, but with no great turn for military matters. Sainte-Croix, therefore, had the organising of the new regiment, and did it with such zeal that he made it one of the finest corps in the army. He distinguished himself in Calabria, and earned the great regard of Masséna, who, after the battle of Eylau, sent for him to Poland, though it was quite against the regulations to take an officer, especially a major, from his regiment. When he reached Warsaw he was presented by Masséna to the Emperor, who, recalling the death of M. de M——, received

him coldly, expressing to the marshal his dissatisfaction at his having been brought away from his regiment. The Emperor had another reason for his unfriendly welcome. Although of short stature himself, Napoleon had a great preference for tall, strong, masculine men; but Sainte-Croix was small, slight, and with the face of a pretty fair-complexioned woman. In this feeble-seeming body, however, there was a soul of steel, an heroic courage, and a restless activity. The Emperor soon recognised these qualities, but, thinking that it was enough for Sainte-Croix to have started with the rank of *major*, he did nothing for him during that campaign. When, however, in 1809, Masséna was put in command of an army corps, he remembered how the Emperor had reproved him for attaching Sainte-Croix to his staff without leave, and asked and obtained him for his aide-de-camp.

In one of the actions preceding our entry into Vienna Sainte-Croix took a flag from the enemy, and the Emperor made him colonel; at Essling he showed wonderful courage and intelligence, and the Emperor's prejudice against him was completely destroyed by the important services which he rendered to Masséna's corps when acting as advanced guard on the isle of Lobau. The Emperor went every day to inspect the fortifications on the island, remaining on foot for seven or eight hours. These long walks fatigued Masséna, who was already a little infirm, and General Becker, chief of the staff, often could not answer the Emperor's questions, while Sainte-Croix, with his wonderful activity and intelligence, knew everything, foresaw everything, and could give the most exact information. Thus Napoleon fell into the way of applying to him, and gradually Sainte-Croix became, if not *de jure*, certainly *de facto* chief of the staff to the army corps which was defending the island of Lobau.

It would have been so easy for the Austrians to bombard us out of this island, that the Emperor went away each evening with regret, and passed each night in cruel anxiety. As soon as he awoke he wished to have news of Masséna's corps, and Sainte-Croix had orders to report to him in his

room every morning at daybreak. Thus, every night the colonel went on foot round the vast island, visiting our outposts and examining those of the enemy; then, mounting his horse, he hurried over the two leagues to Schönbrunn. The aides-de-camp had orders to bring him at once to the Emperor's bedroom, and the Emperor, dressing in his presence, would discuss the position of the two armies. Then they would gallop off to the island; the Emperor would inspect the works all day, often mounting a high double ladder, which the ingenious Sainte-Croix had had set up as an observatory, and whence the movements of the enemy's troops on the left bank could be seen, and in the evening Sainte-Croix would escort the Emperor back to Schönbrunn. For forty-four days in extreme heat he worked in this way, without being weary or slackening his activity for a moment. Often Napoleon would call him to council, when discussing with Marshals Masséna and Berthier the best way of getting the army across to the left bank. The passage would have to be made at a different point to the former one, since it was known that that place had been strongly entrenched by the Archduke. Sainte-Croix proposed to turn the enemy's defences by crossing opposite Enzersdorf, which course was adopted.

In short, Napoleon's opinion of his merit was so high that he said one day to the Russian envoy, M. de Czernicheff, 'I have never since I have been in command of armies met a more capable officer, nor one who understood my thought quicker and executed it better. He reminds me of Marshal Lannes and General Desaix, and if he is not struck down by a thunderbolt France and Europe will be astonished at the distance which I shall take him.' These words were very soon known everywhere, and it was expected that Sainte-Croix would quickly be a marshal. But, unhappily, the thunderbolt did strike him; he was killed the next year by a cannon-ball at the gates of Lisbon.

Napoleon, though he usually kept at a distance the commanders whom he most esteemed, now and again was familiar with one of them, and even amused himself by

inciting him to frank repartees. Thus Lasalle, Junot, and Rapp used to say to the Emperor whatever came into their heads. The two first, who used to ruin themselves every other year, would thus relate their pranks to Napoleon, who always paid their debts. Sainte-Croix was too clever and too decorous to abuse the favour which he enjoyed; still, when the Emperor drove him to it, he was capable of prompt and decisive repartee. Thus, when Napoleon, who would often take his arm, as they walked through the sands of the isle of Lobau, said to him, on one of their numerous expeditions, 'I remember that after your duel with my wife's cousin I wanted to shoot you; I admit that it would have been a mistake and a very great loss.' 'That is quite true, sir,' answered Sainte-Croix, 'and I am certain that now, when your Majesty knows me better, you wouldn't exchange me for one of the Empress's cousins.' 'For one, indeed!' said the Emperor; 'you may say for the lot of them.' Another day, when Sainte-Croix was present, as Napoleon got up the latter said, as he drank a glass of cold water, 'I believe that Schönbrunn in German means "beautiful spring"; it was rightly named, for the spring in the park produces delicious water, which I drink every morning. Do you like cold water?' 'No, indeed, sir; I prefer a good glass of bordeaux or champagne.' Then the Emperor, turning to his valet, said, 'Send the colonel a hundred bottles of bordeaux and the same number of champagne,' and that very evening, as Masséna's aides-de-camp were dining in their bivouac under the trees, we saw several mules, from the imperial stables, arriving with two hundred bottles of excellent wine for Sainte-Croix, and we drank the Emperor's health therein.

CHAPTER II

As the moment approached for crossing the Danube again, the Austrians watched more assiduously the bank of the small arm of the river which lay between us and them. They fortified Enzersdorf, and if a group of French soldiers came too near the part of the island opposite that village their outposts would fire upon them; but they took no notice of parties of two or three. The Emperor wished to have a near view of the enemy's preparations, and it has been said that in order to do so without danger he disguised himself as a private, and did sentry's duty. This report is incorrect; the real fact was as follows. The Emperor and Marshal Masséna, wearing sergeants' great-coats, and followed by Sainte-Croix in a private's uniform, went close up to the bank. The colonel stripped himself, and went into the water, while Napoleon and Masséna, to still any suspicion on the part of the enemy, took off their coats as though they too proposed to bathe, and then examined at their ease the point where they wished to throw the bridges across. The Austrians were so accustomed to see our soldiers come in little parties to bathe at that place that they remained quietly lying on the grass. This fact shows that in war commanders ought strictly to forbid this kind of truce, and marking off of neutral points, which the troops on either side often establish for their respective convenience.

Having settled to cross the river at this spot, the Emperor decided that several bridges should be constructed there; but as it was more than probable that on the alarm being given by the outposts the Austrian troops posted at Enzersdorf would hasten up to oppose the construction of the bridges, it was arranged that 2,500 grenadiers should

first be transported to the other bank, and should at once attack Enzersdorf to occupy the garrison, and prevent their interfering with our works and hindering our passage. This being settled, the Emperor said to Masséna, 'As this leading column will be specially exposed, we must compose it of our best troops, and select a brave and capable colonel to command them.' 'But, sir, that is my job,' said Sainte-Croix. 'How so?' replied the Emperor, who probably asked the question only to draw the answer which he got. 'Why,' said the colonel, 'because of all the officers on the island I am the one who has had the most tiring work for six weeks past. I have been on my legs carrying out your orders day and night; and I beg that your Majesty will be kind enough to give me in return the command of the 2,500 grenadiers who are to make the first landing on the enemy's bank.' 'Well, you shall have it,' replied Napoleon, much pleased with this noble daring; and the final arrangements for the crossing having been made, the attack was fixed for the night of July 4.

Before that time came two important events happened in our army corps. Lieutenant-General Becker was a good officer, though indolent, but it was his fault to criticise everything, and he allowed himself openly to disapprove Napoleon's plan of attack. On hearing of it the Emperor sent him back to France. We shall see how he avenged himself in 1815.[1] General Fririon became chief of the staff; a capable man, but without the firmness required in one acting under Masséna. The other event nearly deprived the Emperor of the aid of Masséna himself in the coming battle. One day, as he and Napoleon were riding round the island, the marshal's horse put its foot in a hole and fell, injuring its rider's leg so that he could not keep his saddle. This was the more annoying that the battle was to take place on the same ground as that of Essling, which

[1 Unfortunately, General Marbot's Memoirs stop short of 1815. General Becker was directed by the Provisional Government to escort Napoleon to Rochefort after his second abdication, and discharged the duty so considerately, that they parted in the most affectionate manner.]

Masséna of course knew well. He showed, however, his determination by asserting that in spite of his pain he would be taken on to the field in a litter, like Marshal Saxe at Fontenoy. A litter was got ready; but it struck the marshal, upon a remark which I ventured to make, that this mode of transport was rather pretentious and not so safe as a light carriage, which, with four good horses, could get him about the ground more quickly than men. It was therefore arranged that he should go thus, accompanied by his surgeon, Dr. Brisset, who changed the compresses every hour with perfect coolness under fire during the two days which the battle of Wagram lasted, and in the subsequent fights.

Knowing that the enemy was expecting him to cross as before between Aspern and Essling, and that it was important to conceal his plan of turning their position by crossing opposite Enzersdorf, Napoleon had a careful watch kept over all who entered the island by the great bridges connecting it with Ebersdorf. Everyone on the island must have learnt the secret towards the end of the time; but as it seemed certain that none were on it but French soldiers or officers' servants, who were all guarded, no danger was apprehended from inquisitiveness on the enemy's part. This, as it turned out, was a mistake; for the Archduke had contrived to introduce a spy among us. Just when he was about to give information of the point which we were going to attack, an anonymous letter, written in Hungarian, was brought by a little girl to the Emperor's Mameluke, Roustan, with the warning that it was important and urgent. It was at first supposed to be a begging letter; but the interpreters soon translated it, and informed the Emperor. He came at once to the island, and on arriving, ordered all works to be suspended, and every soul—troops, staffs, commissaries, butchers, bakers, canteen men, even officers' servants—to be drawn up on parade. As soon as everyone was in the ranks, the Emperor announced that a spy had found his way into the island, hoping to escape notice among 30,000 men; and now that they were all in their places he ordered every man to look at his neighbours to right and left.

The success of this plan was instantaneous. In the midst of the dead silence, two soldiers were heard to cry, 'Here is a man we don't know.' He was arrested and examined, and admitted that he had disguised himself in a French uniform taken from men killed at Essling. This wretch had been born at Paris, and appeared very well educated. Having ruined himself at play, he had fled to Austria to escape his creditors, and there had offered himself as spy to the Austrian staff. A small boat used to take him across the Danube at night, landing him a league below Ebersdorf, and fetch him back the next night on a given signal. He had already been frequently on the island, and had accompanied detachments of our troops going to fetch provisions or materials from Ebersdorf. In order to avoid notice, he always went to places were there was a crowd, and worked with the soldiers at the entrenchments. He got his meals at the canteen, passed the night near the camps, and in the morning, armed with a spade as though on his way to join a working party, he would go all over the island and examine the works, lying down among the osiers to make hurried sketches of them. The next night he would go and make his report to the Austrians, and come back to continue his observations. He was brought before a court-martial and condemned to death; but the bitter regret which he expressed for having served the enemies of France disposed the Emperor to commute the penalty. When, however, the spy proposed to deceive the Archduke by going to make a false report on what he had seen, and coming back to tell the French what the Austrians were doing, the Emperor, disgusted at this new piece of infamy, abandoned him to his fate, and let him be shot.

Meanwhile the day of the great battle was drawing on. Napoleon had assembled round Ebersdorf the Army of Italy, the corps of Davout and Bernadotte with the guard, and transformed the island of Lobau into a vast fortress. Three strong bridges secured the passage of the large arm of the Danube, and everything was ready for throwing several across the small arm. To confirm the Archduke in the belief that

he intended to cross again between Essling and Aspern, Napoleon had the small bridge by which we had retreated after the battle of Essling reconstructed after the night of July 1, and sent across two divisions whose skirmishers might attract the attention of the enemy while all was making ready for our attack on Enzersdorf. It is hard to understand how the Archduke could have supposed that Napoleon would make a front attack upon the huge fortifications with which he had surrounded Essling and Aspern; this would indeed have been taking the bull by the horns.

The second and third were passed by both sides in preparation. The French army, to the number of 150,000 men, was massed on the isle of Lobau; the Archduke assembled an equal force on the left bank, where his troops, posted in two lines, formed an immense arc, overlapping those parts of the island which were opposite to them. The right-hand end of this arc rested on the Danube at Floridsdorf; their centre occupied the villages of Essling and Aspern, which were strongly entrenched, and connected by works armed with many guns. Finally, the left of the arc was at Gross-Enzersdorf, with a strong detachment at Mühlleiten. The Archduke, therefore, was watching all the points of the island by which we could emerge; but as, for some unexplained reason, he had made up his mind that Napoleon would attack his centre, crossing the little arm of the Danube where he had done in May, the Austrian commander had concentrated his whole force in the wide plains which extend from those villages as far as Deutsch-Wagram and Markgrafen-Neusiedel, a large village on the Russbach stream, the steep banks of which, commanded by high ground, offer an excellent defensive position. His right was weak, and his left still weaker, because, though he had ordered his brother the Archduke John, commanding the Army of Hungary, with his 35,000 men, to be by the morning of July 5 at Unter-Siebenbrunn and in touch on the left with the second line of the main army, this order was not carried out.

In pursuance of the Emperor's instructions, the French army began its attack at 9 P.M. on July 5. Just then a

tremendous storm burst; the night was of the darkest, the rain fell in torrents and the noise of the thunder mingled with that of our artillery, which, sheltered from the enemy's shot by an epaulement, aimed all its fire at Essling and Aspern. Thus confirmed in the belief that we were going to land at that point, the Archduke turned all his attention thither, without troubling himself about Enzersdorf, upon which the bulk of our force was marching. As soon as the first shots were heard Marshal Masséna, though still in much pain, was placed in a small open carriage and, surrounded by his aides-de-camp, was driven towards the point where the first attack was to be made. The Emperor soon joined us. He was in good spirits and said to the marshal: 'I am delighted at this storm. What a fine night for us! The Austrians cannot see our preparations to cross opposite Enzersdorf, and they will know nothing of them till we have carried that important position; by which time our bridges will be placed and part of my army formed on the bank which they think we are defending.'

In fact Colonel Sainte-Croix, after having landed his 2,500 grenadiers in silence, took up his ground on the enemy's flank in front of Enzersdorf. A regiment of Croats was bivouacking at this point. Attacked unawares, they defended themselves obstinately with the bayonet; but our grenadiers, inspirited by the voice of Sainte-Croix, who had thrown himself into the hottest of the scuffle, drove back the enemy, who retreated in disorder upon Enzersdorf. That large village, surrounded by a loopholed wall, having in front of it a dyke cut in the form of a parapet, was full of infantry, while all the entrances were covered by small earthworks. To carry the village was all the more difficult, because the houses had been burnt down and the garrison might any moment be supported by General Nordmann's brigade posted a little in rear between this village and that of Mühlleiten. But no obstacle checked Sainte-Croix, who at the head of his grenadiers carried the outer works, pursued the enemy at the sword's point, and entered pell-mell with them into the redan which covered the south gate. The gate was closed, Sainte-Croix drove it in under a hail of bullets from the

loopholed walls. Once masters of this passage, the colonel and his soldiers dashed into the village, while the garrison, weakened by its enormous losses, took refuge in the castle. But at sight of the scaling ladders which Sainte-Croix ordered up, the Austrian commander capitulated. Thus Sainte-Croix, to whom this fine feat of arms did the greatest honour, remained master of Enzersdorf, to the great satisfaction of the Emperor, whose plans were admirably served by its capture. He ordered eight bridges to be at once thrown over the small arm between the island and Enzersdorf. The first of these bridges was an invention of the Emperor's own. It was made in four sections, connected by hinges so as to allow it to turn and follow the windings of the bank; one end was fixed to the trees on the island, while the other was guided towards the opposite bank by the help of a cable carried by a boat. Swinging to the current, this new style of bridge turned on itself, made a complete wheel to the right, and was ready for use in a moment. In a quarter of an hour the other seven were fixed, enabling Napoleon rapidly to bring over to the left bank the corps of Masséna, Oudinot, Bernadotte, Davout, and Marmont, Prince Eugène's army, the artillery reserve, all the cavalry, and finally the guard.

While the Emperor was thus profiting by the capture of Enzersdorf, the Archduke, still convinced that his enemy intended to debouch between Essling and Aspern, was wasting his time and his ammunition in hurling shot and shell on to the part of the island which faced those villages, under the impression that he was causing great loss to the French troops. As, however, we had at that point only a few scouts well protected by earthworks, the projectiles did no damage, and meanwhile the bulk of our troops were traversing the small arm of the river, and forming on the left bank. The Austrian general was astounded when, marching towards the old battle-field on the morning of July 5, with the intention of taking us at a disadvantage the moment we landed, he perceived that his left wing had been turned by the left army, which was marching upon Sachsengang, and shortly occupied that place. Thus surprised, and his rear threatened,

the Archduke was obliged, in order to face us, to execute a retrograde movement on a vast scale towards the Russbach, always retreating before Napoleon, while our various corps were taking up their order of battle in the great plain which spread before them.

The Emperor sent three strong divisions of cavalry, with several battalions, supported by light artillery, to watch for the Archduke John at Siebenbrunn, these troops being regarded as outside the fighting line, and intended merely to prevent a surprise. Of the main army, Davout's corps, resting on the Russbach, formed the right; the centre was composed of Bavarians, Wurtembergers, the corps of Oudinot and Bernadotte, and the Army of Italy. The left, under Masséna, moved along the small arm of the Danube, in the direction of Essling and Aspern. Each of these corps, as it advanced, was to carry the villages on its road. The reserve consisted of Marmont's corps, three divisions of cuirassiers, numerous artillery, and all the imperial guard. Finally, General Reynier, with one division and guns, remained to guard the island of Lobau, the old bridge which we had used at the time of the former battle having been replaced. A splendid day had succeeded the most horrible night. The French army in review order advanced majestically, preceded by an immense force of artillery, which crushed all opposition on the part of the enemy. The regiments composing the Austrian left, with General Nordmann in advance, were the first with whom he came in contact. Driven from Enzersdorf and Mühlleiten, they attempted to defend Raschdorf, but were pushed back, and General Nordmann was killed in the fight. This officer was from Alsace, formerly colonel of the Bercheny Hussars. He deserted to the enemy in 1793 with part of his regiment, at the same time as Dumouriez, and entered the Austrian service. Our march at first meeting no serious resistance, we occupied successively Essling, Aspern, Breitenlee, Raschdorf, and Süssenbrunn. So far Napoleon's plan had succeeded, the troops having crossed the Danube, and occupied the plain on the left bank. But nothing could be considered as decided until we had beaten and thoroughly

broken up the enemy. He now made the serious mistake, instead of uniting his whole force on the Russbach, of dividing it, by retreating on two very divergent lines; one upon Markgraf and Neusiedel, behind the Russbach; the other upon the heights of Stamersdorf, where his right wing was obviously too far from the field of battle. The position on the bank of the Russbach is strong, commanding the plain, and covered by the brook, which, though not large, forms a very good obstacle, its banks being too steep for infantry to cross, except with difficulty, while the only way for cavalry and artillery is over the bridges in the villages which the Austrians held. As, however, the Russbach was the key of the position, Napoleon resolved to seize it. He therefore ordered Davout to attack Neusiedel; Oudinot and Bernadotte, Baumersdorf and Wagram respectively; while Prince Eugène, supported by Macdonald and Lamarque, crossed the stream between the two latter villages. The light artillery of the guard crushed the Austrian masses with its fire, but Marshal Bernadotte, commanding the Saxons, attacked Wagram so feebly that he did not succeed. Macdonald and Lamarque, crossing the Russbach, placed the enemy's centre for a moment in danger; but the Archduke, flinging himself upon that point with his reserves, forced our troops back again across the brook. This movement was at first executed in perfect order, but as night had approached, our infantry, who had just resisted a front attack of the Austrian light horse, seeing in their rear a brigade of French cavalry which General Salme was bringing up to their support, thought they were cut off, and some disorder ensued, aggravated by the blunder of some Saxon battalions firing on Lamarque's division. This confusion, however, was quickly repaired. Oudinot's attack on Baumersdorf, being made with a lack of cohesion, was also repulsed; Davout alone had any success; having forced the Russbach and turned Neusiedel, he was on the point of capturing that village, in spite of an obstinate defence, when night compelled him to suspend the attack, and shortly after the Emperor ordered him to retire, so as not to leave him exposed by being isolated on the further side of the stream.

CHAPTER III

JULY 5, the chief events of which I have recorded, served only as preparation for the decisive battle of the morrow. The night passed quietly; our army, with its three cavalry divisions detached towards Leopoldsdorf, had its true right near Grosshofen; our centre was at Aderklaa; our left somewhat withheld at Breitenlee, giving our line the form of an angle, of which Wagram was the apex. The tents of the Emperor and his guard were a little in advance of Raschdorf. A glance at the plan of the battle of Wagram will show that the enemy's right, starting from the environs of Kampendorf and passing along the left bank of the Russbach to Helmhof, whence it reached by Sauring to Stamersdorf, formed thus a re-entering angle, of which the apex was equally at Wagram. This, therefore, was the essential point of which each side wished to get possession. To succeed in this, the object of either was to turn his enemy's left flank; but the Archduke, having extended his army too much, was obliged to send his orders in writing, and these were either misunderstood or ill-executed; while the Emperor, having his reserves under his hand, could see and superintend the carry-out of his instructions.

At daybreak on the 6th the battle was renewed with more vigour than on the previous day. Much to Napoleon's surprise, the Archduke, who had till then confined himself to the defensive, began to attack, and took Aderklaa from us. Soon the artillery fire extended over the whole line; never in the memory of man had the like been seen, for the number of pieces brought into action by the two armies amounted to 1,200. The Austrian left wing, under the Archduke in person, crossed the Russbach, and debouched by those

columns towards Leopoldsdorf, Glinzendorf, and Grosshofen, but was stoutly resisted, and even checked, by Davout and Grouchy's cavalry by the time that Napoleon came up at the head of an enormous reserve. Seeing the extreme right of his line engaged, he had supposed for a moment that the Archduke John had joined the enemy's main army. So far was this, however, from being the case, that, as we afterwards learnt, he was at that moment at Pressburg, eight leagues from the field of battle. Deprived of the support from him which they had hoped for, the Austrian left soon repented having attacked us. Overwhelmed by superior forces, more especially of artillery, it was driven back across the Russbach, with heavy loss, by Davout, who then sent a portion of his troops across, and marched by both banks on Neusiedel.

His right thus secured, the Emperor returned with his guard to the centre, and while Bernadotte attacked Wagram, and Oudinot marched on Baumersdorf, he ordered Masséna to retake Aderklaa. Taken and re-taken, this village finally remained in the hands of the Austrian grenadiers, whom the Archduke led to a renewed attack, while at the same time he launched a strong column of cavalry against the Saxons, under Bernadotte, routing them completely, and flinging them on Masséna's troops, who were thrown into momentary disorder. The marshal was in his carriage, and the enemy, noticing it with its four white horses in the middle of the line, guessed that its occupant must be a person of importance, and poured a storm of shot upon it. The marshal and those about him were in great danger; we were surrounded with dead and dying. Captain Barain, an aide-de-camp, lost an arm, and Colonel Sainte-Croix was wounded.

The Emperor, galloping up, became aware that the Archduke, in order to turn or even surround his left, was bringing forward his own right wing, which already occupied Süssenbrunn, Leopoldau, and Stadlau, and was marching on Aspern, thus threatening the column of Lobau. In order to be better seen by the troops, he got for a moment into the carriage, beside Masséna, and at sight of him order was restored. He bade Masséna change front to the rear, in order

to bring his left to Aspern and front towards Hirschstetten, causing Macdonald, with three divisions, to take up the ground which Masséna left. These movements were carried out in good order, under an artillery fire from the enemy. Thus Napoleon, profiting by the concentration of his principal forces, brought up to support Macdonald, not only strong reserves of all arms, but finally the imperial guard, which took up its position in three lines in rear of the other troops.

At this moment the positions of the two armies were very curious, the opposed lines having almost the shape of two letters Z placed side by side. The Austrian left, posted at Neusiedel, was giving way before our right, while the two centres were holding their respective places, and our left wing was retreating along the Danube before the enemy's right. The chances of either side thus seemed to be about equal. Really, however, they were all in favour of Napoleon—in the first place, because it was unlikely that the village of Neusiedel, where the only means of resistance was afforded by an old fortified tower, would hold out long against the attack which Davout was delivering with his usual vigour; and it was easy to see that when this was taken, the Austrian left, being outflanked and without support, would retreat indefinitely and get separated from the centre, while our left wing, though beaten at the moment, was in its retreat coming nearer to the island of Lobau, the powerful artillery on which would check the Austrians, and prevent them from following up their success. Secondly, Napoleon, acting on inner lines, could hold a great part of his troops in reserve, and yet show a front in different directions; while the Archduke, being obliged to extend his army, in order to execute his great movement on an outer line with the view of surrounding us, was not in force at any point. The Emperor, observing this mistake, was perfectly calm, though he could read in the faces of his staff the anxiety caused by the conquering march of the enemy's right, which, always driving Masséna's corps before it, had already reached the battle-field of May 22, and after crushing Boudet's division by a formidable charge

of cavalry, was threatening our rear. But the success of the Austrians was short-lived. The hundred heavy guns with which Napoleon's foresight had armed the island of Lobau opened a scathing fire upon the enemy's right, and it was compelled, under pain of annihilation, to halt in its triumphant course, and retire in its turn. Masséna was then able to reform his divisions, which had lost heavily. We thought that Napoleon would profit by the disorder into which the cannonade had thrown the enemy's right wing to attack with his reserves; Marshal Masséna, indeed, sent me to ask for instructions on this point. But the Emperor remained impassible, his eyes ever fixed on the extreme right, towards Neusiedel (which lies high and is surmounted by a tall tower, visible from all parts of the field), waiting to hurl himself upon the enemy's centre and right until Davout had beaten the left and flung it back beyond that village. A valiant defence was being maintained by the Prince of Hesse-Homburg, who was there wounded; but at last we suddenly saw the smoke of Davout's guns beyond the tower. Beyond a doubt the enemy's left was beaten. Then, turning to me, the Emperor said: 'Quick! tell Masséna to fall upon whatever is in front of him, and the battle is won.' At the same time the aides-de-camp from all the other corps were sent off to their chiefs with an order for a simultaneous attack. At this supreme moment Napoleon said to General Lauriston, 'Take a hundred guns, sixty from my guard, and crush the enemy's column.' As soon as their fire had shaken the Austrians, Marshal Bessières charged them with six regiments of heavy cavalry, supported by part of the cavalry of the guard. In vain did the Archduke form squares; they were broken, with the loss of their guns and a great number of men. Our centre advanced in its turn, under Macdonald, and Süssenbrunn, Breitenlee, and Aderklaa were carried after a smart resistance. Meanwhile Masséna had recovered the ground lost on our left, and was pressing the enemy hard, forcing him back beyond Stadlau and Kagran; and Davout, calling Oudinot to his support, occupied the heights beyond the Russbach, and captured Wagram. This decided the

defeat of the Austrians: they retreated all along the line, retiring in very good order along the road to Moravia.

The Emperor has been blamed for not pursuing the defeated army with his usual vigour; but the criticism is baseless. Napoleon was hindered by many weighty reasons from launching his troops too promptly on the enemy's track. In the first place, the high road to Moravia would bring them into a rough country, divided by wooded hills, ravines, and gorges, commanded by the mountains and forests of Bisamberg, which would offer excellent defensive positions, all the more difficult to carry that the Archduke could occupy them with a large force, much of which had not been engaged, while his rear-guard was protected by powerful artillery. We might therefore expect a stubborn resistance, which, if prolonged, would lead to a night battle. Of these the chances are always uncertain, and the Emperor's victory might well be compromised.

In the second place, to ensure the assembling of the French army in the isle of Lobau by the 4th, it had been necessary to put some of the corps in movement as early as the 1st. These, in order to reach the meeting-place, had had to make forced marches, succeeded without any rest between by a battle extending over two days of very hot weather. Our troops were therefore worn out; while the Austrians, who had been for more than a month in camp, had had only the fatigues of the battle to endure. Thus, if we had attacked the Archduke in the strong position which he had taken up, every advantage would have been on his side.

But a third and still more powerful argument checked Napoleon's ardour and decided him to allow his troops time to rest on the field of battle. He had just been warned by the generals of his light cavalry placed by him to look out beyond his extreme right that an enemy's force of 35,000 to 40,000, under the command of the Archduke John, had been seen debouching at Unter Siebenbrunn, that is to say, upon what, since our change of front, had become our actual rear. The reserve provided by the Emperor would doubtless have

been enough to repulse the Archduke; but one must admit that prudence would lead Napoleon not to engage his troops in the attack of the strong positions which the Archduke Charles appeared determined to defend obstinately, so long as he himself was open to an attack in rear from the Archduke John at the head of a strong and perfectly fresh force. The Emperor therefore ordered the pursuit to cease, and made his army bivouac in such a way that one part fronted to the side where the Archduke John was, and was ready to receive him if he ventured into the plain. Fearing, however, to come into contact with our victorious troops, he retreated hastily towards Hungary. If Napoleon had pursued with his usual vigour, the trophies from Wagram would probably have been more numerous, but on considering the motives which decided him to halt one cannot but praise his caution. If he had always acted with as much prudence he would have spared both France and himself great calamities.

In order to rest for a few hours after its victory, our army took up its position with its left at Floridsdorf, its centre in front of Gerhardsdorf, and its right beyond the Russbach. The Emperor's tents were pitched between Aderklaa and Raschdorf, and Masséna's headquarters were at Leopoldau. The replacement of the old Spitz bridge put the army in direct communication with Vienna, which favoured the transport of the wounded to the hospitals, and of food and ammunition to the army.

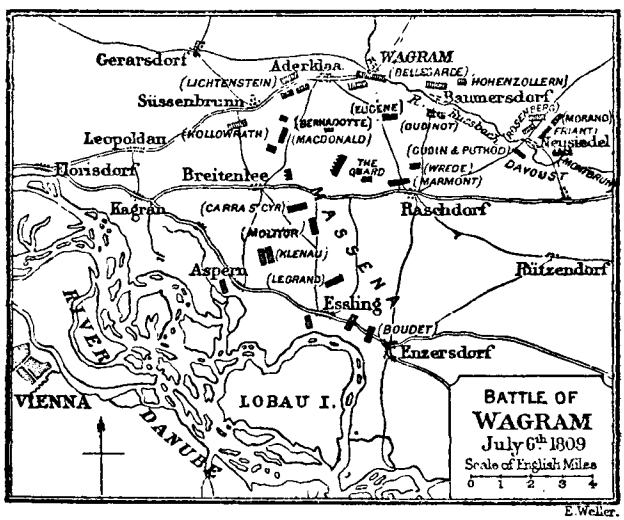
The Austrians have, not without reason, blamed the Archduke John for the delays in his march and his carelessness in carrying out the Archduke's Charles' orders. Indeed, on the evening of the 4th Charles wrote to his brother to leave Pressburg at once, and form a junction with the Austrian left at Siebenbrunn; but although John received the order by 4 A.M. on the 5th he did not march till eleven in the evening, and moved so slowly that, although he had only eight leagues to do, he took twenty hours to reach Siebenbrunn, not coming up till seven o'clock on the 6th, by which time the battle was lost and the Austrians were in full retreat. The Archduke Charles never forgave his brother for not

carrying out his orders; John lost his command and was banished to Styria.[1]

In the absence of pursuit, the Austrian losses were much less considerable than they might have been. Still, they admitted 24,000 killed and wounded, among the former three of their generals. One of them, Wukassowitz, had distinguished himself against Bonaparte in Italy; the other two, Nordmann and D'Aspre, were Frenchmen in arms against their country. According to the bulletins we made 20,000 prisoners and captured 30 guns; but I believe this estimate was much exaggerated. We only took a few colours. Our loss was nearly equal to that of the enemy; Generals Lacour, Gauthier, and Lasalle, and seven colonels were killed. The enemy had ten generals, including the Archduke, wounded; the number of ours was twenty-one, among them, Marshal Bessières. Among the twelve colonels wounded three were special favourites with the Emperor—Dumesnil, Corbineau, and Sainte-Croix: the two first, who belonged to the mounted chasseurs of the guard, lost a leg apiece; the Emperor rewarded them richly. As for Sainte-Croix, who had his skin grazed by a cannon-ball, his wound was not dangerous, at which his friends rejoiced. However, if he had lost a leg he might perhaps have been living now, as well as his brother Robert, one of whose legs remains on the battle-field of Moskwa. Although Sainte-Croix had been only two months colonel, and was not yet twenty-seven, the Emperor made him major-general, Count with 25,000 francs pension, Grand Cross of the Order of Hesse, and Commander of that of Baden. On the evening of the battle the Emperor rewarded the services of Macdonald, Oudinot, and Marmont by giving each of them his marshal's bâton. It was not, however, in his power to give them the talents required to command an army; brave and good divisional generals as they were when in the Emperor's hands, they showed them-

[1 Forty years later he reappeared on the scene. In 1848 the German revolutionists named him Vicar-General of the Germanic Empire. In the meantime he took an active part in the early exploration of the Austrian Alps.]

selves clumsy when they were away from him, either in devising a plan of campaign, or in executing it, or modifying it according to circumstances. It was held in the army that the Emperor, not being able to replace Lannes, wanted to get the small change for him: a severe judgment, but we must remember that these three marshals played an unlucky part in the campaigns which ended in the fall of Napoleon and the ruin of the country.



CHAPTER IV

General Lasalle, who fell at Wagram, was keenly regretted both by the Emperor and the army. He was the best light cavalry officer for outpost duty, and had the surest eye. He could take in a whole district in a moment, and seldom made a mistake, so that his reports on the enemy's position were clear and precise. He was a handsome man, and of a bright wit, but, although well educated, he had adopted the fashion of posing as a swashbuckler. He might always be seen drinking, swearing, singing, smashing everything, and possessed by a passion for play. He was an excellent horseman, and brave to the point of rashness. Although he had fought in the first revolutionary wars, he was little known before the famous campaign of 1796, when, as a captain in the 2nd Hussars, he attracted the notice of General Bonaparte at the battle of Rivoli. This took place, as is well known, on a lofty plateau bounded on one side by steep rocks, at the foot of which flows the Adige, along the road to Rivoli. The Austrians, having been beaten by the French infantry, were leaving the battle-field by every available way. One of their columns hoped to escape by reaching the valley over the rocks; but Lasalle followed them down this difficult passage with two squadrons. In vain it was represented to him that cavalry cannot be employed on such dangerous ground. He galloped down the descent, followed by his hussars; the astonished enemy retreated headlong. Lasalle overtook them, and made some thousand prisoners under the eyes of General Bonaparte and the army. From this day onwards Lasalle was in high favour with Bonaparte, who promoted him rapidly and took him to Egypt, where he made him colonel. In one of the

numerous engagements with the Mamelukes the thong which held Lasalle's sabre to his wrist broke; he dismounted in the thickest of the mêlée, and, undisturbed by danger, picked up his weapon, nimbly remounted, and dashed at the enemy afresh. One must have seen a cavalry combat to appreciate the courage, coolness, and dexterity which such a deed requires, especially in presence of horsemen like the Mamelukes.

Lasalle had intimate relations with a French lady in high society, and while he was in Egypt their correspondence was seized by the English and insultingly published by order of the Government—an act which even in England was blamed. A divorce followed, and on his return to Europe Lasalle married the lady. As general, Lasalle was placed by the Emperor in command of the advanced guard of the Grand Army. He distinguished himself at Austerlitz and in Prussia; having the audacity to appear before Stettin and summon the place with two regiments of hussars. The governor lost his head and brought out the keys, instead of using them to lock the gates, in which case all the cavalry in Europe could not have taken it. This feat brought Lasalle much credit, and raised the Emperor's liking for him to a high point. Indeed, he petted him to an incredible degree, laughing at all his freaks, and never letting him pay his own debts. Just as he was on the point of marrying the lady to whom I have referred, Napoleon had given him 200,000 francs out of his privy purse. A week later, meeting him at the Tuileries, the Emperor asked, 'When is the wedding?' 'As soon as I have got some money to furnish with, sir.' 'Why, I gave you 200,000 francs last week! What have you done with them?' 'Paid my debts with half, and lost the other half at cards.' Such an admission would have ruined any other general. The Emperor laughed, and, merely giving a sharp tug to Lasalle's moustache, ordered Duroc to give him another 200,000.

At the close of the battle of Wagram, Lasalle's division had not been engaged. He came and begged Masséna to let him pursue, and the marshal assented, on condition that he

would act with prudence. Hardly had Lasalle started, when he saw a brigade of enemy's infantry, which was hastening, closely pressed, to reach the village of Leopoldau, in order to obtain a regular capitulation and escape the fury of the victors in the open. Lasalle guessed what the Austrian general was after, and, pointing to the setting sun, addressed his men, 'The battle is ending, and we alone have not contributed to the victory. Come on!' He dashed forward, sword in hand, followed by his squadrons, and, in order to prevent the enemy from entering the village, made for the narrow space now left between the head of the column and Leopoldau. The others, seeing themselves cut off from the hoped-for shelter, halted and opened a brisk file-fire. A bullet struck Lasalle in the head, killing him on the spot. His division lost a hundred troopers, besides many wounded. The Austrians opened their way to the village, and when our infantry divisions came up, capitulated, the officers declaring that that had been their intention in making for Leopoldau. Thus Lasalle's charge was useless, and he paid dear for a mention in a bulletin.

His death left a great gap in our light cavalry, which he had trained to a high degree of perfection. In other respects, however, he had done it much harm. The eccentricities of a popular and successful leader are always imitated, and his example was long mischievous to the light cavalry. A man did not think himself a chasseur, still less a hussar, if he did not model himself on Lasalle, and become, like him, a reckless, drinking, swearing rowdy. Many officers copied the fault of this famous outpost leader, but none of them attained to the merits which in him atoned for the faults.

When a battle is fought in summer, it often happens that the ripe corn is set on fire by shells and gun-wadding; but in no battle of the Empire did this occur on such a scale as at Wagram. The season was early, and the weather hot; the battle-field was completely covered with crops ready for harvest, which caught quickly and carried the fire with terrific rapidity. The movements of both armies were

hampered by the necessity of avoiding it; for if once troops were overtaken by it, pouches and wagons exploded, carrying destruction through the ranks. Whole regiments might be seen hastening out of the way of the fire, and taking up their position where the corn had been burnt already; but this means of escape was only open to the able-bodied. Of the soldiers who were severely wounded great numbers perished in the flames; and of those whom the fire did not reach, many lay for days hidden by the tall corn, living during that time on the ears. The Emperor had the plain searched by bands of cavalry, and vehicles were brought from Vienna to remove the wounded, friends and foes alike. But few of those even whom the fire had passed recovered, and the soldiers had a saying that straw-fire had killed nearly as many as gun-fire.

The two days of the battle were an anxious time for the Viennese, who, from their roofs and towers, could enjoy a full view of all that took place, and who swayed from hope to fear with the progress of the fight. The famous and witty field-marshal Prince de Ligne, now well advanced in years,[1] had assembled the best society in Vienna in his country house, on the highest of the neighbouring hills, whence the eye could take in the whole field of battle. With his experience of war and his keen intelligence, he quickly seized Napoleon's design and the Archduke's blunders, and foretold the defeat of the latter. When the Viennese saw the right of their army, on the 6th, rolling back our left, they broke into a frenzy of joy, and through our glasses we could see thousands of men and women waving hats and handkerchiefs to kindle still further the courage of their troops, who were winning at that point, but there only. The Prince de Ligne did not share the joy of the Viennese, and I have it from one who was close by the old soldier that he said to his guests, 'Do not rejoice just yet; in less than a quarter of an hour the Archduke will be beaten. He has no reserves, and you see the plain is

[1 Born 1735. He survived five years longer, dying during the Congress of Vienna.]

crowded with the masses of Napoleon's!' His prediction was justified. As, however, one must do justice even to an enemy, I may say, after criticising the Archduke's tactics, that his blunders are vastly excused by the hope, which he was justified in having, of the arrival of his brother with 35,000 or 40,000 men to fall on our right or rear. Moreover, it must be allowed that, having formed his plan, he carried it out with much vigour, showing great personal courage, with a remarkable gift of keeping up the spirit of his troops. Of this I will cite a striking instance.

As is well known, every regiment has, besides its colonel commanding, a proprietary colonel, whose name it bears; usually some prince or general. At his death the regiment passes to another, so that a corps may often have to abandon a name illustrated on a score of fields, and take some new and unknown designation. In this way Latour's dragoons, so famous throughout Europe in the days of the early Revolution wars, when General Latour died took the name of General Vincent, whereby a fine tradition was destroyed, the self-esteem of the regiment injured, and their zeal materially weakened. Now it happened on the first day of Wagram that the Archduke, seeing that his centre was on the point of being broken by Oudinot's corps, decided to attack this with cavalry, and ordered Vincent's dragoons, who were at hand, to charge. They did so, but without vigour; they were beaten off, and the French advance continued. Again the Archduke sent the regiment at them, and again it recoiled before our battalions. The Austrian line was pierced. In this emergency the Archduke, hastening to meet the regiment, stopped it in its flight, and, to shame it for its lack of vigour, said in a loud voice, 'Vincent's Dragoons, it is easy to see that you are no longer Latour's Dragoons!' Humiliated by this cutting but deserved reproach, they replied, 'Yes, yes, we are!' 'Well, then,' cried the Archduke, drawing his sword, 'show yourselves worthy of your old fame, and follow me!' A bullet struck him, but he flew upon the French. Vincent's regiment followed him with ardour; their charge was terrible, and Oudinot's grenadiers

fell back with heavy loss. This is how an able and energetic general contrives to turn everything to account which can restore the shaken courage of his men. The Archduke's address kindled the dragoons to such a degree that after stopping Oudinot's grenadiers, they charged Lamarque's division, and recaptured 2,000 prisoners and five stand of colours which it had just taken. In complimenting the dragoons the Archduke said, 'Now you can be proud to bear the name of Vincent, which you have just made no less illustrious than that of Latour.' This regiment was one of those which on the following day contributed most to the rout of Boudet's division of infantry.

Among the multitude of episodes to which the battle of Wagram gave rise, the most important, and one which produced very strong feeling in the army, has not been related by any author. I mean the disgrace of General Bernadotte, who was ordered off the field by the Emperor. Between these two eminent persons no love was ever lost; and since the conspiracy of Rennes, got up by Bernadotte against the Consular Government,[1] they had been on very bad terms. This notwithstanding, Napoleon had included Bernadotte in the first creation of marshals, and made him Prince of Ponte Corvo at the request of Joseph Bonaparte, whose sister-in-law Bernadotte had married. Nothing, however, could appease Bernadotte's hatred and envy of Napoleon. He flattered him to his face, and afterwards, as the Emperor well knew, criticised and found fault. The ability and courage which he had shown at Austerlitz would have induced the Emperor to overlook his misdeeds had he not aggravated them by his conduct at Jena. In spite of the urgent requests of his generals, he let his three divisions remain wholly inactive, refusing to support Davout, who a league away, at Auerstädt, was withstanding half the Prussian army under the King in person, and ultimately beat them. The army and all France were indignant with Bernadotte; but the Emperor did no more than reprimand him severely. Stimulated by this, the marshal did well at Hall and

[1] See vol. i. chap. xv.

Lubeck, but soon fell back into his customary laziness, ill-will possibly, and, in spite of orders, was two days late for the battle of Eylau. This lukewarm conduct roused afresh the Emperor's dissatisfaction, which grew more and more during the campaign in Austria. Bernadotte, in command of a corps of Saxons, always came up late, acted without energy, and criticised not only the Emperor's tactics, but the way in which the other marshals handled their troops. The Emperor, however, restrained his irritation until on the first day of the battle of Wagram Bernadotte's lack of vigour and false tactics allowed the Austrians to re-take the important position of Deutsch-Wagram. It seems that after this repulse Bernadotte said to some officers that the crossing of the Danube and subsequent action had been mismanaged, and that if he had been in command he could by a scientific manœuvre have compelled the Archduke to surrender almost without a blow. This remark was reported the same evening to the Emperor, who was naturally angry. Such were the terms on which Napoleon and Bernadotte stood when the undecided action was resumed on the 6th.

We have seen that when the battle was at its height, the Saxons, badly handled by Bernadotte, were repulsed and charged by the enemy's cavalry, being flung in disorder upon Masséna's corps, which they nearly carried with them. The Saxons are brave, but the best of troops are sometimes routed; and in such cases it is of no use for the officers to try to rally the men who are within reach of the enemy's sabres and bayonets. Generals and colonels should get as quickly as possible to the head of the flying mass, then face about, and by their presence and their words arrest the movement of retreat, and re-form the battalions. In conformity with this rule, Bernadotte, whose personal bravery was unquestioned, galloped off into the plain at the head of his staff, to get in front of the fugitives and stop them. Hardly was he clear of the throng, when he found himself face to face with the Emperor, who observed, ironically, 'Is that the scientific manœuvre by which you are going to make the Archduke lay down his arms?' Bernadotte's

vexation at the rout of his army was heightened by learning that the Emperor knew of his inconsiderate remark of the previous day, and he remained speechless. Presently recovering himself, he tried to mutter some words of explanation; but the Emperor in a severe and haughty tone, said: 'I remove you, sir, from the command of the army corps, which you handle so badly. Withdraw at once, and leave the Grand Army within twenty-four hours; a bungler like you is no good to me.' Therewith he turned his back on the marshal, and, taking command for the moment of the Saxons, restored order in their ranks, and led them again to meet the enemy.

Under any circumstances, Bernadotte would have been in despair at such an outburst; but as he had been ordered to leave the field at the moment when he was galloping ahead of the fugitives, which might give an opening for slanderous tongues to reflect on his courage, though the object of his retreat was to check that of his soldiers, he understood how much worse it made his position, and it is asserted that in his despair he wished to throw himself on the enemy's bayonets. His aides-de-camp, however, held him back, and took him away from the Saxon troops. All day long he strayed about the battle-field, and stayed towards evening behind our left wing at the village of Leopoldau, where his officers persuaded him to pass the night in the pretty little château belonging to that place. Hardly, however, was he established, when Masséna, who had ordered his headquarters to be fixed at Leopoldau, came to take possession of the same house. As it is customary for generals to be quartered in the midst of their troops, and not to lodge in villages where their colleagues' regiments are, Bernadotte wished to give way to Masséna; the latter, however, not yet knowing of his colleague's mishap, begged him to stay and share the quarters with him, to which Bernadotte agreed. While arrangements were being made for their lodging, an officer who had witnessed the scene between the Emperor and Bernadotte came and told Masséna of it, whereupon he changed his mind, and discovered that the house was not roomy enough for two marshals and their staffs. Wishing,

however, to keep up an appearance of generosity, he said to his aides-de-camp, 'This lodging was mine by rights, but as poor Bernadotte is in trouble I must give it up to him; find me another place—a barn, or anywhere.' Then he got into his carriage and went off without a word to Bernadotte, who felt this desertion deeply. In his exasperation he committed another and very serious mistake; for though no longer in command of the Saxon troops, he addressed them in a general order, in which he made the most of their exploits, and consequently of his own, without waiting for the usual assignment of credit on the part of the commander-in-chief. This infringement of regulations increased the Emperor's anger, and Bernadotte was obliged to withdraw from the army and return to France.

Among the remarkable incidents of the battle of Wagram, I may mention the combat between two cavalry regiments, which, though serving in hostile armies, belonged to the same proprietary colonel, Prince Albert of Sachs-Teschen. He had married the celebrated Archduchess Christina of Austria, governor of the Low Countries, and, having the title of prince in both states, he possessed a regiment of hussars in Saxony and of cuirassiers in Austria. Both one and the other bore his name, and, as was the custom of both states, he appointed all the officers in each. Austria and Saxony having been at peace for many years, whenever he had an officer to place he would put him indifferently in whichever regiment had a vacancy, so that out of one family there could be found some members in the Saxon hussars, and others in the Austrian cuirassiers. Now, by an accident at once deplorable and extraordinary, these two regiments met on the battle-field of Wagram, and, impelled by duty and by the point of honour, they charged each other. Strange to say, the cuirassiers were broken by the hussars, who, in their desire to retrieve under the eyes of Napoleon the repulse of the Saxon infantry, fought with the greatest vigour. Indeed, the Saxon infantry, though it has often shown its courage, is far from being either as solidly organised or as well trained as the cavalry, which is rightly held to be one of the best in Europe.

CHAPTER V

You will probably now like to hear my own adventures in this terrible battle. Though frequently much exposed, especially on the second day, when the enemy's artillery converged its fire on Marshal Masséna's carriage, and we were literally under a hail of cannon-balls, which struck down a good many around me, I was lucky enough not to be wounded. I was also in considerable danger when the Austrian cavalry had broken and routed Boudet's division, and the marshal sent me to that general in the middle of 10,000 flying soldiers, who were being hewn down by the cavalry. Again I was more than once in danger when, in carrying orders, I had to pass near some of the many spots where the corn was blazing. By frequent détours I managed to escape the flames, but it was impossible to avoid crossing the fields where the ashes of the burnt straw were still hot enough to scorch the horses' feet. Two of mine were rendered useless for some time by the injuries they thus received, and a third was in such pain that he was within an ace of rolling me over in the half-extinguished straw. However, I got through without any serious accident; but though I escaped personal damage, a disagreeable thing befell me, which had very injurious results. On the second day of the battle I got into almost hopeless trouble with Masséna. The way of it was this. The marshal sent me with a message to the Emperor; I had the very greatest difficulty in reaching him, and was coming back after having galloped more than three leagues over the yet burning ashes of the corn. My horse, dead beat, and with his legs half burnt, could go no further when I got back to Masséna, and found him in a great difficulty. His corps was retreating before the enemy's right along

the Danube, and the infantry of Boudet's division, broken by the Austrian cavalry, which was sabring them mercilessly, were flying pell-mell across the plain. It was the most critical moment of the battle. From his carriage the marshal could see the imminent danger, and was calmly making his dispositions to maintain order in the three infantry divisions which as yet were unbroken. For this purpose he had been obliged to send so many aides-de-camp to his generals that he had none with him except his son, Prosper Masséna, a young lieutenant. At that moment he saw that the fugitives from Boudet's division were making for the three divisions which were still fighting, and were on the point of flinging themselves upon their ranks, and drawing them along in a general rout. To stop this catastrophe the marshal wished to tell the generals and officers to direct the torrent of fliers towards the island of Lobau, where the disordered troops would find a secure shelter behind the powerful artillery. It was a dangerous mission, as there was every probability that the aide-de-camp who went into that disorderly rabble would be attacked by some of the enemy's troopers. The marshal could not make up his mind to expose his son to this danger, but he had no other officer near him, and it was clear that the order must be carried.

I came up just at the right moment to extricate Masséna from this cruel dilemma, so, without giving me time to take breath, he ordered me to throw myself into the danger which he dreaded for his son; but observing that my horse could hardly stand, he lent me one of his, which an orderly was leading. I was too well acquainted with military duty not to be aware that a general cannot bind himself to follow the arrangement which his aides-de-camp have made amongst themselves for taking their turn of duty, however great the peril may be; the chief must be free in a given case to employ whichever officer he thinks best suited to get his orders executed. Thus, although Prosper had not carried a single order all day, and it was his turn to go, I made no remark. I will even say that my self-esteem hindered me from divining the marshal's real motive in sending me on a duty both

difficult and dangerous when it ought to have fallen to another, and I was proud of his confidence in me. But Masséna soon destroyed my illusion by saying, in a wheedling tone, 'You understand, my friend, why I do not send my son, although it's his turn; I am afraid of getting him killed. You understand? you understand?' I should have held my tongue, but, disgusted with such ill-disguised selfishness, I could not refrain from answering, and that in the presence of several generals: 'Marshal, I was going under the impression that I was about to fulfil a duty; I am sorry that you have corrected my mistake, for now I understand perfectly that, being obliged to send one of your aides-de-camp to almost certain death, you would rather it should be I than your son, but I think you might have spared me this cruel plain speaking.' And without awaiting a reply I went off at full gallop towards Boudet's division, which the enemy's troopers were pitilessly slaughtering. As I left the carriage I heard a discussion begin between the marshal and his son, but the uproar of the battle and the speed at which I was going prevented me from catching their words. Their sense, however, was shortly explained, for hardly had I reached Boudet's division and begun doing my utmost to direct the terrified crowd towards the island of Lobau, when I beheld Prosper Masséna at my side. The brave lad, indignant at the way in which his father had sent me into danger and wished to reduce him to inactivity, had escaped unawares to follow me. 'I wish,' said he, 'at least to share the danger from which I ought to have saved you if my father's blind affection had not made him unjust to you when it was my turn to go.' The young man's noble straightforwardness pleased me; in his place I should have wished to do the same. Still, I had rather he had been further off at this critical moment, for no one who has not seen it can form an idea of a mass of infantry which has been broken and is being actively pursued by cavalry. Sabres and lances were working terrible execution among this rabble of terrified men, who were flying in disorder instead of taking the equally easy and much safer course of forming themselves into groups and defending

themselves with the bayonet. Prosper Masséna was very brave, and in no way dazed by the danger, although we found ourselves every moment in this chaos face to face with the enemy's troopers. My position then became very critical, since I had a threefold task to fulfil. First, to parry the blows aimed at young Masséna, who had never learnt the sword exercise and used his weapon clumsily; secondly, to defend myself, and lastly, to speak to our demoralised soldiers to make them understand that they were to go towards the island of Lobau and not towards the divisions which were still in line. Neither of us received any wound, for when the Austrian troopers perceived that we were determined to defend ourselves vigorously, they left us, and turned their attention to the unresisting foot-soldiers.

When troops are in disorder, the soldiers fling themselves like sheep in the direction where they see their comrades running, and thus, as soon as I had imparted the marshal's orders to a certain number of officers, and they had shouted to their people to run towards the island, the stream of fugitives made in that direction. I found General Boudet at last, and he succeeded under the fire of our guns in rallying his troops. My task was thus at an end, and I returned with Prosper towards the marshal. But in my desire to take the shortest road, I imprudently passed near a clump of trees, behind which some hundred Austrian uhlans were posted. They charged upon us unawares, we meanwhile making at full speed for a line of French cavalry which was coming our way. We were none too soon, for the enemy's squadron was on the point of reaching us, and was pressing us so close that I thought for a moment that we were going to be killed or taken prisoners. But at the approach of our men the uhlans wheeled about, all but one officer, who, being admirably mounted, would not leave us without having a shot at us. One bullet pierced the neck of Prosper's horse, and the animal, throwing up his head violently, covered young Masséna's face with blood. I thought he was wounded, and was getting ready to defend him against the uhlan officer, when we were met by the

advanced files of the French regiment. These, firing their carbines at the Austrian officer, laid him dead on the spot, just as he was turning to gallop off.

Prosper and I then returned to the marshal, who uttered a cry of grief on seeing his son covered with blood. But on finding that he was not wounded he gave free vent to his anger, and in the presence of several generals, his own aides-de-camp, and two orderly officers of the Emperor's, he scolded his son roundly, and ended his lecture with the words, 'Who ordered you to go and stick your head into that row, you young idiot?' Prosper's answer was really sublime. 'Who ordered me? My honour! This is my first campaign. I am already lieutenant and member of the Legion of Honour; I have received several foreign decorations, and so far I have done nothing for them. I wished to show my comrades, the army, and France that if I am not destined to have the military talent of my illustrious father, I am at least worthy by my courage to bear the name of Masséna.' Seeing that his son's noble sentiments met with the approbation of all the bystanders, the marshal made no answer; but his anger fell chiefly on me, whom he accused of having carried his son away, when, on the contrary, his presence was a great hindrance to me. The two orderly officers having reported at headquarters the scene between the marshal and his son, Napoleon heard of it, and happening to come that evening to Leopoldau, sent for Prosper, and said to him, taking him in a friendly way by the ear: 'Good, very good, my dear boy; that is how young people like you ought to start on their career.' Then, turning to the marshal, he said in a low tone, but loud enough to be heard by General Bertrand, from whom I have the story, 'I love my brother Louis no less than you your son; but when he was my aide-de-camp in Italy he did his turn of duty like the others, and I should have been afraid of bringing him into discredit if I had sent one of his comrades into danger instead of him.' This reproof from the Emperor, in addition to the answer which I had been foolish enough to make to Masséna, naturally set him still more against me.

From that day forward he never addressed me with *tu*, and although outwardly he treated me well, I knew that the grudge would remain, and as you will see I was not mistaken.

Never again did the Austrians fight with so much vigour as at Wagram; their retreat was admirable for its coolness and good order. They had, no doubt, the advantage, for the reasons I have stated, of leaving the field without being pursued; but I am not able to explain the reasons for Napoleon's delay in following them up on the ensuing morning. It has been said that as the roads both to Bohemia and to Moravia were in front of him, the Emperor was awaiting the result of reconnoissances in order to know what force the the Archduke had on each of these roads. Reconnoissances, however, can only give very incomplete information, since the enemy's rear-guard very soon brings them to a halt, and they can see nothing beyond. Precious time was therefore lost uselessly; we had seen the enemy's columns marching off on both the roads, and should have pursued them at daybreak on the 7th by one or the other. However that may be, the Emperor did not commence the pursuit till 2 P.M., and went himself no more than three leagues, staying the night at the château of Volkersdorf, from which the Emperor of Austria had on the two previous days watched the battle. General Vandamme was left in command at Vienna, General Reynier in the island of Lobau, Oudinot at Wagram, and Macdonald at Floridsdorf. His rear thus secured, Napoleon sent Marmont and Davout in pursuit on the road to Moravia, and Masséna on that to Bohemia. The Army of Italy and the guard marched between the two high roads, ready to give support where it was wanted.

The stronger portion of the Austrian army was on the road to Bohemia. The Archduke had made good use of the night of the 6th, and so much of the 7th as Napoleon had allowed him, and his baggage wagons and artillery were well out of our reach. On leaving the field of battle we fell in with the scouts of the enemy's rear-guard in the defile of Langen-Enzersdorf, a long and narrow passage which

would have been fatal to the Archduke if, on the previous day, we had been able to push him back to it. Passing this we entered a wide plain, in the middle of which stands Korn-Neuburg, a small walled town. Here the rear-guard, composed of nine battalions of Croats and Tyrolese Jägers, with a strong body of cavalry and plenty of guns, awaited us in impressive tranquillity. No doubt it is right in war to be enterprising, especially in presence of an already beaten foe; but this rule must not be followed beyond the limits of prudence. French cavalry generals are often too venturesome. Here they repeated the fault which Montbrun had committed before Raab in the previous June, when he would not wait for the infantry, and, leading his squadrons too near the fortress, suffered heavily from its artillery. In spite of that severe lesson, General Bruyère, who had succeeded Lasalle in the command of the light cavalry of Masséna's corps, having the lead when we emerged from the defile, would not wait for the infantry to pass him and form in the plain. Deploying his squadrons, he advanced towards the enemy, who, remaining quite still, let him come within cannon-range, then opened a heavy fire, under which he lost heavily. At sight of this Masséna got very angry, and sent me to Bruyère to express his dissatisfaction. I found the general at the head of his division, under a storm of balls, brave enough, but much vexed at having run into this risk, and much perplexed as to his best course. If he charged the Austrian cavalry, of twice his own numbers, he would have his division cut up. On the other hand, if he retreated to get out of range, and await the infantry, it was certain that the enemy's cavalry would be on him as soon as he had faced about, and would drive him back on our battalions, as they issued from the defile. The only other thing was to stay where he was, and wait for the infantry; and this seemed the least of evils, as I permitted myself to tell General Bruyère, when he did me the honour to ask my advice. When I repeated it to the marshal, he approved, but was still in a high rage with the general, exclaiming every moment: 'Can you conceive anyone getting his people

killed like that for no good?' Meanwhile, he hurried up Legrand's division, and, as soon as it was formed, sent the 26th to attack Korn-Neuburg. The place was taken, and the enemy's cavalry driven back by Bruyère's squadrons, who much preferred the danger of a charge to being pounded, as they had been for half-an-hour, by the artillery. The general behaved like a hero in the hand-to-hand fighting, which did not save him from being sharply reprimanded by the marshal.

On the 8th Masséna continued the pursuit, but we only had a slight engagement. We occupied the town of Stockerau, taking large stores of provisions, especially wine, which delighted the soldiers. Continuing on the 9th, the army was stopped by a strong force, before Hollabrunn. A brisk fight ensued, in which General Bruyère, remembering his mistake, handled his division more prudently, but exposed himself freely, and got severely wounded. The unlucky town of Hollabrunn, hardly rebuilt after the fire in 1805,[1] was again reduced to ashes, and again many wounded men were buried in the ruins. The enemy withdrew with loss.

During the night of the 9th the marshal sent me to the Emperor with a report of the action. After a long march, and frequently losing my way in country roads, I reached Napoleon, still at the chateau of Volkersdorf. His Majesty had just learned that a great part of the Austrian army, leaving the road to Moravia, was marching towards Laa, to cross the Taya, and rejoin the Archduke at Znaym, and had sent Marmont in haste to follow them. He took the same direction himself on the 10th, while Davout pushed on to Nikolsburg, and took it. I was sent back to Masséna with orders to march quickly on Znaym, where the enemy appeared to be concentrating, with the view of again giving battle. All through the 10th the enemy's rear-guard retreated steadily before Masséna's corps. After its losses at Hollabrunn, some disorder began to show itself, and we made a great many prisoners. The same day, Prince Liechtenstein appeared at our outposts with a flag of truce, to ask for an armistice on the part of the Austrian commander-in-chief.

[1] See vol. i., p. 185.

Masséna sent him on to Napoleon with one of his officers, but by the time they reached Volkersdorf the Emperor had set out for Laa, and the flag of truce only reached him the next evening at Znaym, a delay which cost a good many lives. The Austrian rear-guard, after retreating all day without fighting, in the evening disputed our entrance into the village of Guntersdorf. There was a brisk artillery engagement, in the course of which a ball struck Masséna's carriage, and another killed one of the horses. Luckily, the marshal had got out five minutes before. We repulsed the enemy at length, and passed the night at Guntersdorf.

In war, spies are indispensable. Masséna used to employ in this capacity two Jews, brothers, very intelligent men, who, in order to get accurate information, and earn higher pay, used to slip in among the Austrian columns, under guise of selling fruit and wine; then, falling to the rear, they would wait till the French came up, and report to the marshal. While he was at Hollabrunn, he had promised a large sum to one of these Jews if he would get him, by the next evening, an approximate 'state' of the forces in front of us. Tempted by this bait, the Israelite travelled all night by country roads, reached the head of the Austrian army, and climbed a leafy tree in a wood, where he was able to command a view of the road without being seen. As the columns filed past, the Jew entered in a note-book the strength of each arm. While he was thus occupied, a sergeant of Jägers entered the wood for a few moments' rest, and lay down just at the foot of the tree in which the Jew was perched. In his alarm the spy probably made some movement in order to hide himself; the note-book fell from his hand, and dropped by the sergeant's side. Looking up, he saw a man amongst the topmost branches, and took aim at him, ordering him to come down. The miserable Jew was forced to obey, and was taken before an Austrian general, who, on seeing the accusing note-book, had him bayonetted. He lay on the road till the French army came up, some hours later. As soon as the second Jew, who was with us at that moment, beheld his brother's corpse,

he broke out into fearful shrieks; then, collecting himself, he rummaged the dead man's pockets. Finding nothing there, however, he cursed the enemy for, as he said, stealing from him the money which his brother had with him; and, finally, so that he might at least inherit something from him, he took all his clothes, in order to sell them later on. There you have a good picture of the Jewish character!

CHAPTER VI

On July 11, an ill-omened day for me, Masséna's corps appeared before Znaym about 10 A.M., and half a league to our right we could see Marmont's divisions on the plateau of Teswitz, which they had reached by the road from Laa to Brunn. By mid-day the Emperor and his guard were at Zuckerhandel, and the Army of Italy not far away. The town of Znaym is surrounded by a solid wall, and stands on a vine-clad hill, at the foot of which runs the river Taya and a large brook named Lischen, which joins the Taya below Teswitz. Thus the hill of Znaym forms a position entrenched by nature, for the banks at most points bristle with steep rocks difficult of access. The ground falls towards the village of Oblass, through which runs the Vienna road, by which we arrived.

Having had no answer to his proposal of an armistice, the Archduke resolved to profit by the good position which he occupied, and risk the chance of another battle. Accordingly he formed his army in two lines, the first having its right on the Taya near Klosterbruck, its centre opposite Teswitz, and its left reaching to Kukrowitz. The second line occupied Znaym, the Galgenberg, and Brenditz, with the reserves in rear; while a swarm of skirmishers defended the vineyards between Znaym and the two streams.

On arriving before Oblass Masséna occupied that village and the double bridge which crosses the river at the so-called 'Pheasants' Island.' Legrand's division, after capturing it, went on towards Alt-Schallersdorf and Klosterbruck, a large convent turned into a tobacco factory. Here our troops met with a brisk resistance, and as our artillery were unable to pass through the vines, and had consequently

to fire uphill from the bank of the river, it was unable to afford them any support. The marshal regretted that his inability to mount his horse prevented him from going to see for himself what could be done to remedy this state of things; whereupon I ventured to say that having explored the ground before the attack, I thought that a battery going from Oblass along the right bank of the river, and taking up its position above the village of Edelspitz, might do good service. Masséna, thanking me for the suggestion, ordered me to guide six guns to the spot named; and these, taking in rear the troops defending Klosterbruck and Alt-Schallersdorf, did so much execution among them that they quickly abandoned those two positions to our troops. As the marshal was congratulating himself on the effect produced by this battery, I went up and suggested taking another to the Kuhberg, the highest ground on the left bank, which could be reached by strengthening the teams. He agreed; and after some trouble I got eight guns on to the Kuhberg, whence they could play full on the Austrians massed in front of Znaym; so that I have no doubt but that, if the battle had continued, our battery on the Kuhberg would have been of great use by forcing the enemy to retire within the place. It is the best point from which to reduce the fortress of Znaym with artillery.

While this brisk cannonade was going on, a fearful storm burst over the district. In a moment everything was under water; the Taya overflowed; not a gun or musket could be fired. General Legrand's troops took shelter in Klosterbruck and Schallersdorf, and most of all in the cellars hollowed out among the vineyards. But while our soldiers, unheeding the enemy, whom they supposed to be under shelter in Znaym, were emptying the casks, the Archduke, informed doubtless of this carelessness, and wishing to cut off the retreat of Legrand's division, sent a column of a thousand men from the town. Marching at the double down the high road, they went through Alt-Schallersdorf, and reached the first bridge at Oblass just as I was coming down from the Kuhberg. I had gone up by way of Neu-Schallersdorf, having

brought my guns from Oblass; but when I went back alone it seemed useless to go so far round, as I knew that all the ground between Znaym and the Taya was occupied by our infantry. So, as soon as I reached the little bridge between Edelspitz and Pheasants' Island, I crossed the Taya to reach the large bridges on the high road opposite Oblass, where I had left the marshal. Just as I had got on to the causeway connecting these two bridges, I heard behind me, in spite of the storm, the sound of many feet marching in time. Turning my head I beheld a column of Austrian grenadiers not twenty-five paces away. My first impulse was to go off at full speed to warn the marshal and his troops; but to my great surprise I found the bridge nearest to Oblass occupied by a brigade of French cuirassiers. General Guiton, who commanded it, knowing that Legrand was on the other side of the river, and having received an indistinct order, was quietly advancing at a walk. I had hardly time to say, 'There is the enemy,' when the general saw them, drew his sword, and shouting 'Gallop!' flew at the Austrian grenadiers. Having come to attack us unawares, they were so astounded at being thus unexpectedly attacked themselves that the foremost ranks had hardly time to bring their bayonets down. In a moment the three battalions were literally rolled over under the hoofs of the cuirassiers' horses, not one remaining on his legs. One only was killed; we took all the rest prisoners, with three guns which they had brought to fortify the Pheasants' Island.

Their return to the offensive would have had awkward results for us, if the Archduke had carried it out with more troops, and at the same time attacked Legrand's division in the vineyards. Unable to retreat by the bridges, our men would have undergone a severe reverse. But the Austrian general miscalculated when he flattered himself that a thousand of his men on the Pheasants' Island could have held it against three of our divisions, while Legrand's division, when attacked itself, would certainly have tried to force a passage. Thus, caught between two fires, the thousand grenadiers would equally have had to surrender, though General

Guiton's unexpected attack doubtless saved much loss of life. Emboldened by their success, though not knowing the ground, the cuirassiers charged right up to the gates of Znaym, General Legrand's infantry hurrying up to their support, and the town was nearly carried. But superior forces, backed by powerful artillery, forced the French back to Alt-Schallersdorf, and Klosterbruck, when Masséna sent Carra-Saint Cyr's infantry division to their support.

At this moment, the Emperor, posted on the heights of Zuckerhandel, ordered Marshal Marmont to debouch from Teswitz and get in touch with Masséna's right. The battle was spreading gradually, and in order to get nearer to it, Napoleon came to Teswitz. Masséna sent me to his Majesty to report, and I came back with orders to carry the town at any cost. Our battery on the Kuhberg was hammering it, and Marmont was about to assault by the valley of the Leska. As they beat the charge on all sides, the sound of the drums, muffled by the rain, mingled with the thunder. Our troops, in good spirits, advanced bravely against the battalions which were stoutly awaiting them in their position before Znaym; only an occasional shot came from the houses. Everything foretold a bloody bayonet fight, when an officer from the Emperor galloped up with an order from Masséna to cease fighting, as an armistice had just been concluded. The marshal at once sent officers with the news to the different points of the line, and appointed me by name to go towards that one of our brigades which was nearest to the town and had the smallest distance to cross in order to reach the enemy. Coming up in the rear of these regiments, I vainly tried to speak; my voice was drowned by cries of 'Vive l'Empereur!' which always preceded a fight, and the bayonets were already crossing. A moment longer, one of those terrible infantry tussles would take place, which, once started, cannot be checked. I hesitated no longer, and passing through the files, I got between the two lines, which were on the point of meeting. As I was shouting, 'Peace! peace!' and with my left hand giving the sign for a halt, suddenly a bullet from the

outskirts of the town struck me on the wrist. Some of our officers, understanding at length that I brought the order to suspend hostilities, halted their companies; others, seeing the Austrian battalions within a hundred paces, were doubtful. At the same moment, an aide-de-camp from the Archduke also came between the two lines, with a view of preventing the attack, and got a bullet through his shoulder, from the same quarter. I hastened towards him, and to make both sides see for what purpose we had been sent, we testified it by embracing each other. At sight of this, the officers on both sides had no more hesitation about ordering a halt. Flocking round us, they learnt that an armistice had been agreed on. There were mutual congratulations; the Austrians returned to Znaym, and our troops to their former position.

The blow which I received had been so sharp that I thought my wrist was broken; luckily, it was nothing of the kind, but the bullet had injured the tendon. None of my many wounds have caused me so much pain; I had to carry my arm in a sling for six months. My wound, however, was far less severe than that of the Austrian aide-de-camp. He was quite a young man, full of pluck, and in spite of what had happened would come with me to Masséna, quite as much to see the famous old warrior as to carry a message which the Archduke had sent by him. As we were going together to Klosterbruck, the Austrian officer, who was losing blood freely, nearly fainted, and I proposed to take him back to Znaym. But he persisted in coming with me to be treated by the French surgeons, who, he said, were much better than those of his own army. His name was Count d'Aspre, and he was the nephew of the general of that name who was killed at Wagram. Masséna received him kindly, and took every sort of care of him. As for me, the marshal, seeing me wounded again, felt bound to agree with all the officers, and even the soldiers of the brigade, who praised my devotion in going between the two armies to prevent bloodshed. Napoleon came round the bivouacs in the evening, and expressed his satisfaction with me in lively

terms, adding, 'You get wounded very often, but I will reward your zeal.' He had formed a plan of creating a military order of the Three Fleeces, the knights of which were bound to have had at least six wounds, and I learnt afterwards that his Majesty had entered me on the list of officers to receive this decoration, of which I shall have to speak hereafter. He asked to see M. d'Aspre, who had devoted himself as I had, and gave him many complimentary messages for the Archduke.

While deeming it fortunate that the cuirassiers had reached the bridges just at the moment when the Austrian grenadiers were going to take possession of them, Napoleon was surprised that heavy cavalry should have been sent across the river on to a hill-side, where the only passage was a high road with steep sides among vineyards. No one, therefore, admitted having given the order; it came neither from the marshal nor from his chief of staff, and as the general of cuirassiers could not point out the officer who had brought it, the author of this lucky blunder remained unknown.

In the few minutes during which the grenadiers occupied Pheasants' Island, they captured three of our generals, Fririon, Masséna's chief of staff, Lasouski, and Stabenrath, and relieved them in a trice of their purses and silver spurs. The generals, who had been set free the next moment by our cuirassiers, treated their short captivity as a good joke.

I have mentioned that before I received my wound, and immediately after the brilliant charge of the cuirassiers, the marshal had ordered me to report it to the Emperor at Zuckerhandel. As the storm had made it impossible to ford the Taya, I had to cross it in front of Oblass, by the Pheasants' Island bridges, just as Marshal Marmont's troops were debouching from Teswitz. The enemy's artillery had opened a terrible fire upon them, so that the ground near the river was ploughed up by the balls. But as there was no means of taking another road without going a long way round, I took that line. I had left Oblass with Major de Talleyrand Périgord, who was on the imperial staff, and was returning

after bringing an order to Masséna. He had already been that way, and offered to guide me. As he was going in front of me along the narrow path beside the right bank of the Taya, the enemy's fire increased and we quickened our pace. All of a sudden a confounded soldier of the transport corps, his horse laden with plundered chickens and ducks, came out from the willows on the river bank, a few paces from M. de Talleyrand, and went off along the path at full gallop. But his horse being knocked over by a cannon-ball, that of M. de Talleyrand, who was just behind him, tumbled over its body, and came down with a crash. Seeing my companion fall, I dismounted to help him up, a difficult job, for one of his feet was entangled in the stirrup under the horse's body. The transport man, instead of helping us, ran and hid among the trees, and I was left alone to perform a task which was made all the more troublesome by the cannon-balls pitching all round us, and by the fact that the enemy's skirmishers were pushing ours back, and might come upon us. I could not, however, leave a comrade in this awkward position, so I set to work, and after incredible efforts I was lucky enough to get the horse up, and put M. de Talleyrand back in his saddle, and we resumed our course. I felt all the more deserving because I had never met my companion before; he expressed his gratitude in the warmest terms, and when we had got to Zuckerhandel, and I had delivered my message to the Emperor, I was congratulated by all the officers of the headquarters staff. M. de Talleyrand had told them what I had done, and kept repeating, 'That's what you may call a first-rate comrade.' Some years afterwards, on my return from the exile to which I was condemned at the Restoration, M. de Talleyrand, then General of the Royal Guard, received me pretty coldly. However, when I met him twenty years later at Milan, whither I accompanied the Duke of Orleans, I bore him no grudge, and we shook hands. It was on the same journey that I met M. d'Aspre at Cremona; he was then a general in the Austrian service, having been till 1836 in that of Spain. Later on, he was second in command of the Army of Italy, under the famous Marshal Radetzky.

But to return to Znaym. The Austrians evacuated the town, and Masséna fixed his headquarters there, his army corps encamping in the neighbourhood. By the armistice a third of the Austrian monarchy with eight million inhabitants had been provisionally given up to Napoleon—a powerful guarantee of peace.

M. d'Aspre, being too badly hurt to rejoin his own army, stayed at Znaym. I saw much of him; he was a quick-witted man, but rather excitable. I too had a good deal of pain from my wound, and could not ride; therefore, Masséna sent me with despatches for the Emperor, bidding me post to Vienna, where he and the staff soon came. Our people and horses remained at Znaym. Peace took a long time to conclude, Napoleon wishing to crush Austria, while the Austrians were encouraged to hold out for better terms by the news that the English had landed in Holland and taken Flushing. Cambacérès, who governed France during the Emperor's absence, sent all available troops to the Scheldt, putting (much to Napoleon's displeasure) Bernadotte in command. The English withdrew before long.[1] The conferences were resumed, and went on no faster. We continued to occupy the country, and Masséna's headquarters remained at Vienna till November 10. My wound prevented me from taking any part in the amusements of the place, but I was kindly treated by the Countess Stibar, on whom I was quartered. At Vienna I found my friend, General Sainte-Croix, who was kept some months in bed by his wound. He was quartered in the Lobkowitz palace, where Masséna was. I passed much time with him every day, and told him about the dislike which the marshal seemed to have conceived for me since the incident at Wagram. As he had great influence with Masséna, he used it in my favour, and this, with my conduct at Znaym, restored me to a fairly good place in the marshal's esteem; but then by overplain speaking I destroyed the good result, and revived the marshal's ill-will towards me.

As I have told you, the injury to his leg caused by the

[1 The unlucky 'Walcheren Expedition.']

fall from his horse at Lobau had compelled Masséna to use a carriage at the battle of Wagram and the subsequent actions. In the first instance, artillery horses were to be harnessed to the carriage, but it was found that they were too long for the pole and not easy enough in their action, so four horses from the marshal's stable were substituted. Two soldiers from the transport train were to drive, and they were just getting into the saddle on the evening of July 4, when the marshal's own coachman and postilion declared that as he was using his own horses it was their business to drive. No representation of the danger into which they were running could deter them from their purpose; the coachman got on the box and the postilion mounted just as if they were going for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne. The two brave servants were in constant danger for eight days, especially at Wagram, where many hundred men were killed close to the carriage, and at Guntersdorf, where the ball which struck the carriage went through the coachman's overcoat, and another ball killed the horse under the postilion. Nothing seemed to frighten these two faithful attendants, whose devotion was admired by the whole army. Even the Emperor complimented them, and observed once to Masséna: 'There are 300,000 combatants on the field; now do you know who are the two bravest? Your coachman and your postilion. For all the rest of us are here in pursuance of our duty, while these two men might have excused themselves from being exposed to death. Their merit is therefore greater than that of anyone else.' To the men themselves he called out: 'You are two brave fellows!' Napoleon would certainly have rewarded them, but he could only have given them money, and he probably thought that this might offend Masséna, in whose service the danger had been incurred, and, indeed, it was the marshal's business, and all the more so that he had an enormous fortune; 200,000 francs as army leader, another 200,000 as Duke of Rivoli, and 500,000 as Prince of Essling. But for all that he allowed two months to pass without telling the men what he meant to do for them. One day when I and several of the

aides-de-camp happened to be by Sainte-Croix's bedside, Masséna came into the room, and as we chatted over the events of the campaign, he said how fortunate it was that he had followed my advice and gone on to the field in a carriage, instead of being carried by grenadiers, and thence he naturally went on to speak of the plucky conduct of his coachman and postilion. He ended by saying that he wished to reward them well, and was going to give each of them 400 francs. Then, turning to me, he had the face to ask if the two men would not be pleased? I had better have held my tongue, or merely suggested a rather higher sum; but I made the mistake of speaking too plainly and mischievously into the bargain. I knew perfectly well that Masséna only intended to give them 400 francs down; but I answered that with a pension of 400 francs added to their savings, the coachman and postilion would be secured from want in their old age. The eyes of a tigress who sees her young attacked by the hunter are not more terrible than were Masséna's on hearing me speak thus. He leapt from his chair, exclaiming: 'Wretch! do you want to ruin me? What! an annuity of 400 francs? No, no, no: 400 francs once for all!' Most of my comrades prudently held their peace; but General Sainte-Croix and Major Ligniville declared plainly that the proposed reward was unworthy of the marshal, and that he ought to make it an annuity. At this Masséna could restrain himself no longer; he rushed about the room in a rage, upsetting everything in his way, even large furniture, and cried, 'You want to ruin me!' His last words as he left the room were, 'I would sooner see you all shot, and get a bullet through my arm, than bind myself to give an annuity of 400 francs to anyone. Go to the devil the lot of you!' Next day he came among us again, very calm outwardly, for no one could play a part better; but from that day forward General Sainte-Croix lost much of his esteem, and he bore a grudge against Ligniville which he let him see the next year in Portugal. As for me he was most angry with me of all, because I was the first to mention the annuity. The story travelled from mouth to mouth till it

reached the Emperor, and one day when Masséna was dining with him, Napoleon kept bantering him about his avarice, and said that he understood he had at any rate given a good pension to the two brave servants who drove his carriage at Wagram. Then the marshal answered that he was going to give them each an annuity of 400 francs; so he did it without having to be shot through the arm. He was all the more angry with us, and often said to us with a sardonic laugh, 'Ah! my fine fellows, if I followed your good advice you would soon have me ruined.'

Seeing that the Austrian plenipotentiaries kept putting off the conclusion of the treaty of peace, the Emperor kept ready for war, bringing up numerous reinforcements, which he inspected daily at the parade held in the court of the palace at Schönbrunn. The recruits attracted many sight-seers, who were allowed to approach too freely; thus one day a student named Frederick Stabs, son of a bookseller at Naumburg, and member of the secret society called the Tugendbund, or League of Virtue, took advantage of this lack of supervision to slip into the group which surrounded the Emperor. General Rapp had twice told him not to come so near, and on pushing him away for the third time he felt that the young man had arms concealed under his clothes. Being arrested, he confessed that he wished to deliver Germany from the Emperor's yoke by killing him. Napoleon would have spared his life and treated him as insane; but as the doctors declared that he was not mad, and the man himself persisted in saying that if he escaped he should try to accomplish what had been a longstanding purpose, he was tried by court-martial and shot.

The treaty of peace was signed on October 4; the Emperor left Austria on the 22nd, and it was ten days later before the troops had left the place. Then Masséna permitted his officers to return to France. I left Vienna November 10, driving as far as Strasburg with my comrade Ligniville. I had left my servant behind to bring one of my horses on to Paris. From Strasburg I was afraid to continue my journey alone, for my arm was much swelled, and I was

in great pain. Fortunately, I found in my hotel the surgeon-major of the 10th Chasseurs, who was kind enough to dress my wound and to share my carriage as far as Paris, taking care of me on the way. The doctor left the army, and settled at Chantilly, where I met him, twenty years later, at the table of the Duke of Orleans, as commandant of the national guard. I was still very poorly when I reached Paris, but rest and my mother's care soon made me well.

Thus ended the year 1809. Now, if you recollect that I began at Astorga, in Spain, during the campaign against the English, and then took part in the siege of Saragossa, where I got a bullet through my body; if you consider that I had next to cross part of Spain, and the whole of France and Germany; that I was present at the battle of Eckmühl; mounted the walls of Ratisbon; performed the risky passage of the Danube at Mölk; fought for two days at Essling, where I was wounded in the leg; then was engaged for sixty hours at the battle of Wagram; and, lastly, was wounded in the arm at the action at Znaym, you will agree that this year had been very eventful for me, and had seen me pretty frequently in danger.

CHAPTER VII

THE year 1810 opened happily for me. I was at Paris with my mother, and my wounds being quite healed, I was able to go into society. I became very intimate with M. and Mme Desbrières, whose daughter I married in the following year. Before that happy moment came, however, I had a laborious campaign and plenty of danger to go through.

The Emperor had appointed Marshal Masséna to the command of a formidable army, which was to march in the spring upon Lisbon, then occupied by the English. We made our arrangements, therefore, to set out; but as the French way is to make amusement a prelude to fighting, Paris was unwontedly brilliant that winter. Everywhere, both at court and in private houses, were balls and parties, to which, as aide-de-camp of the Prince of Essling, I had constant invitations. The Emperor required that the great officials, to whom he gave enormous salaries, should encourage trade by luxurious entertainments, and they rivalled each other in earning their master's favour by doing their duty in this respect. Of them all the most conspicuous was Count Marescalchi, ambassador from Napoleon, King of Italy, to Napoleon, Emperor of the French. This diplomatist, who had a fine house in the Champs Elysées, at the corner of the present Avenue Montaigne, had devised a form of amusement which, if not new, was brought to perfection by him; I mean the fancy-dress or masked ball. As etiquette prevented fancy-dress from being worn at Court or at high officials' houses, M. Marescalchi had a monopoly of this kind of entertainment. All the best society went to them, and the Emperor (who had just been divorced from

Joséphine, but had not yet married Marie-Louise) never missed one; it was even said that he arranged them. Wearing a plain black domino and common mask, and with Duroc, similarly disguised, on his arm, Napoleon used to mix with the crowd and puzzle the ladies, who were rarely masked. The crowd, it is true, consisted of none but trustworthy persons, because M. Marescalchi always submitted his list to the minister of police; and also because the assistant-adjutant-general, Laborde, so well known for his talents in scenting a conspirator, was at the entrance of the rooms, and allowed no one to enter without showing his face and ticket, and giving his name. Agents in disguise went about, and a battalion of the guard furnished sentries to every exit. These precautions, however, were so well managed by Duroc, that once in the room, the guests were unconscious of any supervision.

I never missed one of these gatherings, and had much amusement at them. One night, however, my pleasure was disturbed by an awkward incident which is worth recording. My mother was some kind of relation to General Sahuguet d'Espagnac, whose father had been governor of the Invalides under Louis XV. General Sahuguet was appointed, under the Consulate, Governor of Tobago, and died there, leaving a widow, who came to live at Paris. She was a good woman, but of a sharpish temper; so my mother and I did not often visit her. Now, it happened that once in the course of this winter I met at her house a friend of hers, of whom I had often heard, but whom I did not know. Mme X—— was a lady of great stature, over fifty years of age. She was said to have been very handsome, but nothing remained of it save her splendid hair. Her voice and demeanour were those of a man; with her lofty air and vigorous language, she was a very dragoon. Her late husband had held high office, but he had abused the confidence of the Government, and her pension had been commuted, on what she thought inadequate terms. Having come to Paris to protest against what she called a crying injustice, and finding her claims rejected by the ministry,

she applied in vain to all the members of the Imperial family, and, finally, in despair, resolved to speak to the Emperor himself. Unable to obtain an audience, she pursued Napoleon everywhere, trying to get at him wherever he went. She had found out that he was going to M. Marescalchi's ball, and thinking that the diplomatist would not decline to receive the widow of a man once in a high position, she boldly wrote, asking for an invitation. The ambassador put her name on his list, where it escaped the notice of the police, and Mme X—— had just received a ticket for a ball on the evening of the day when I met her at Mme Sahuguet's. In the course of conversation she found out that I was going, and said that she should be glad to meet me there, as she had few friends in Paris, and none of them went to Marescalchi's balls. I replied by some polite commonplace, little thinking that the result would be one of the most awkward situations I ever was in.

Night came, and I went to the Embassy. The ball was on the ground floor, card-tables being on that above. When I entered quadrilles were going on, and a crowd was gazing at the magnificent costumes. Suddenly, in the midst of silk, velvet, feathers, and embroideries appeared a colossal female figure, clad in plain white calico, with red corset, and bedizened with coloured ribbons in the worst taste. This was Mme X——, who had found no better way of displaying her magnificent hair than dressing as a shepherdess, with a little straw hat over one ear, and two large tresses down to her heels. Her curious get-up, and the strange simplicity of the dress in which she appeared in the brilliant assembly, drew all eyes towards her. I had the curiosity to look that way, having unluckily taken off my mask. Mme X——, feeling awkward in the crowd of strangers, came to me, and took my arm without more ado, saying aloud, 'Now I shall have a partner.' I should have willingly seen this strange shepherdess at the devil, all the more so that from her indiscreet confidences I feared a scene with the Emperor, which would have seriously compromised me. I was looking for an opportunity of getting rid of her, when a pretext spon-

taneously presented itself. As I have said, most of the ladies unmasked on coming in, which made the gathering more pleasant. Some men did the same for coolness, and so long as they were few in number it was allowed. If, however, all had uncovered their faces, the only two masked men would have been the Emperor and Duroc, and the occasion would have lost all its attraction for Napoleon, who liked to go about incognito and hear what people said. Now, just when I was wishing most ardently to get away from Mme X——, many men beside myself had their masks off, and M. Marescalchi's secretaries were beginning to go round the rooms, requesting us to resume them. Mine was in my pocket, but I pretended to have left it in the next room, and, promising to return quickly, I left the shepherdess under the plea of going to fetch it.

Rid at length of this dreadful incubus, I hastened up to the first floor, where, going through the quiet card-rooms, I went and established myself in a room at the further end, dimly lighted by a shaded lamp. No one being there, I took off my mask, and was resting and consuming an excellent ice, rejoicing in my escape, when two masked men, short and stout, in black dominoes, entered the little room. 'Here we shall be out of the crowd,' said one; then, calling me by my name without prefix, he beckoned me to him. I could not see his face, but as I knew all the great dignitaries of the Empire were in the house, I felt sure that a man who could so imperatively summon an officer of my rank must be an important personage. I came forward, and the unknown said in a whisper, 'I am Duroc; the Emperor is with me. He is overcome by the heat and wishes to rest in this out-of-the-way room; stay with us, to obviate any suspicion on the part of chance enterers.' The Emperor sat down in an arm-chair, looking towards a corner of the room. The general and I placed ours back to back with his, so as to cover him, facing the door, and began to chat, by the general's wish, as if he were one of my comrades. The Emperor, taking off his mask, asked the general for two handkerchiefs, with which he wiped his face and neck; then, tapping me lightly on the

shoulder, he begged me (that was his term) to get him a large glass of cold water, and bring it myself. I went at once to the nearest buffet, and filled a glass with iced water; but as I was about to carry it to the room where Napoleon was, I was accosted by two tall men in Scotch costume, one of whom said in my ear, 'Can Major Marbot answer for the wholesomeness of that water?' I thought I could, for I had taken it at random from one of the many decanters standing there for the use of all comers. Doubtless, these two persons were some of the police agents who were distributed about the house under various disguises to look after the Emperor without worrying him by too ostentatious attention, and moved about at a respectful distance, ready to fly to his help if they were wanted. Napoleon received the water which I brought him with so much satisfaction that I thought he must be parched with thirst; to my surprise, however, he swallowed only a small mouthful, then, dipping the two handkerchiefs in the iced water, he told me to put one on the nape of his neck while he held the other to his face, repeating, 'Ah! that's good, that's good!' Duroc then resumed his chat with me, chiefly about the recent campaign in Austria. The Emperor said, 'You behaved very well, especially at the assault on Ratisbon and your crossing of the Danube; I shall never forget it, and before long I will give you a notable proof of my satisfaction.' I could not imagine what this new reward was to consist of, but my heart leapt for joy. Then, oh, woe! the terrible shepherdess appeared at the end of the little room. 'Oh! there you are, sir! I shall complain to your cousin of your rudeness,' she exclaimed. 'Since you deserted me I have been all but smothered ten times over. I had to leave the ball-room, the heat is stifling. It seems comfortable here; I will rest here.' So saying, she sat down beside me.

General Duroc said nothing, and the Emperor, keeping his back turned and his face in the wet handkerchief, remained motionless; more and more so as the shepherdess, giving free play to her reckless tongue, and taking no notice of our neighbours, told me how she thought she had more than once

recognised the personage whom she sought in the crowd, but had not been able to get at him. 'But I must speak to him,' she said, 'he absolutely must double my pension. I know that people have tried to injure me by saying that I was free in my youth. Good heavens! go and listen for a moment to the talk down there, between the windows. Besides, what about his sisters? What about himself? What does he come here for, if not to be able to talk as he likes to pretty women? They say my husband stole; poor devil! he took to it late, and was pretty clumsy at it! Besides, have not his accusers stolen, too? Did they inherit their town houses and their fine estates? Didn't *he* steal in Italy, Egypt, everywhere?' 'But, madam,' said I, 'allow me to remark that what you say is very unseemly, and I am all the more surprised you should say it to me, that I never saw you till this morning.' 'Oh! I speak the truth before anyone. And if he does not give me a good pension, I will tell him, or write to him, what I think of him pretty plainly. Oh! I am not afraid of anything.' I was on tenterhooks, and would willingly have exchanged my situation for a cavalry charge or a storming-party. However, my agony was alleviated by feeling that Mme X——'s chatter would clear my character with my two neighbours when they heard that I had never seen her till that morning, had not brought her to the ball, and had got away from her as soon as I could.

Nevertheless I was rather anxious about the way in which this scene would end, when Duroc, leaning towards me, said: 'Don't let this woman follow us.' He rose; the Emperor had replaced his mask while Mme X—— was raving at him, and as he passed in front of her he said to me, 'Marbot, people who take an interest in you are pleased to know that you never met this charming shepherdess till to-day, and you would do well to send her off to feed her sheep.' So saying, Napoleon took Duroc's arm and went out. Mme X——, astounded and thinking she recognised them, wanted to dart after them. I knew that, strong as I was, I could not hold this giantess by the arm, but I seized her by the skirt, which tore at the waist with a loud crack. At the sound the

shepherdess, fearing that if she pulled she would presently find herself in her shift, stopped short, saying, 'It's he! it's he!' and reproaching me bitterly for having hindered her from following. This I endured patiently until I saw in the distance the Emperor and Duroc with the two Scotchmen following a little way off come to the end of the long suite of rooms and reach the staircase. Judging, then, that Mme X—— would not be able to find them in the crowd, I made her a low bow without a word, and went off as quick as I could. She was ready to choke with rage, but feeling that the lower part of her garment was about to desert her, she said to me, 'At least, try to get me some pins, for my dress is falling off.' But I was so angry at her freaks that I left her in the lurch, and I will even admit that I was mischievous enough to rejoice at her awkward position. I quickly left the house and returned home. I passed a disturbed night, seeing myself in my dreams pursued by the shepherdess, who, in spite of my remonstrances, kept insulting the Emperor horribly. Next day I went to cousin Sahuguet to tell her the extraordinary conduct of her dangerous friend: she was disgusted, and forbad her house to Mme X——, who a few days after received orders to leave Paris, nor do I know what became of her.

The Emperor, as is well known, attended a state Mass every Sunday, after which there was a grand reception at the Tuileries, open to everyone who had reached a certain rank in the civil or judicial service, and to officers in the army. As such I had the entrée, of which I only availed myself once a month. The Sunday following the day on which the scene I have related took place I was in a perplexity. Ought I to show myself to the Emperor so quickly, or would it be better to let some weeks pass? I consulted my mother, and her opinion was that as I was in no way to blame in the affair, I had better go to the Tuileries, showing no signs of embarrassment, which advice I followed. The people who came to court formed a rank on each side of the way to the chapel. The Emperor passed in silence between them, returning their salutes. He replied to mine by a good-natured smile, which

seemed to me of good omen and completely reassured me. After the Mass, as Napoleon went through the rooms again, and, according to his custom, addressed a few words to the people who were there, he stopped in front of me, and being unable to express himself freely in presence of so many hearers he said to me, sure that I should take his meaning: 'I am told that you were at Marescalchi's last ball; did you enjoy yourself very much?' 'Not the least bit, sir.' 'Ah!' replied the Emperor, 'if masked balls sometimes offer agreeable adventures, they are apt also to cause very awkward ones. The great thing is to get well out of them, and no doubt that is what you did.' As soon as the Emperor had passed on, General Duroc, who was behind me, said in my ear, 'Confess that there was a moment when you were in a considerable fix. I was so no less, for I am responsible for all the invitations; but it won't happen again. Our impudent shepherdess is far away from Paris, and will never come back.' The cloud which had a moment disturbed my tranquillity was dissolved, and I recovered my habitual gaiety. Very soon I had cause to be well satisfied, for at the following reception the Emperor was good enough to tell me in public that he had included me in the number of officers who were to receive the order of the Three Fleeces.

You will doubtless like to know something about this new order, the creation of which, though announced in the 'Moniteur,' was never carried into effect. As you know, Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, founded in the fifteenth century the famous order of the Golden Fleece. By the marriage of the daughter of Charles the Bold to the heir of the house of Austria, the Duchy of Burgundy, and with it the right of conferring the Golden Fleece, passed to that house, and the Emperor Charles V., after uniting the crown of Austria to that of Spain, continued to enjoy the privilege. When Spain and Germany were separated after his death, the princes of the house of Austria, though no longer possessing the Duchy of Burgundy, preserved the grand mastery of the Golden Fleece uncontested. But when, on the extinction of the Austrian branch in Spain, a French

prince mounted that throne, the Kings of Spain, as well as the house of Austria, claimed the right of conferring the order. Some people considered that neither the one nor the other had the right; but that since Burgundy now formed part of France it was proper that a Burgundian order should be given by our kings. They never did give it, however, but the sovereigns of Austria and Spain each continued to do so, so that there was both a Spanish and an Austrian Golden Fleece. Finding things in this state at his accession, the Emperor Napoleon resolved, as being actually in possession of the old Burgundy, to throw the two rival orders into the shade by creating that of the Three Fleeces, restricting the members to a small number in order to make it more illustrious, and admitting them only on condition of distinguished service, the first requirement being that the receiver should have been wounded at least four times. Great privileges and a considerable pension were to be attached to the decoration.

By a sentiment which one can easily understand, Napoleon chose to date the decree founding the new order from Schönbrunn, the palace of the Emperor of Austria, at a moment when the French armies, having just conquered half of his dominions, were occupying Spain. The King of Spain, probably, did not feel this fresh outrage, which was a small matter after the loss of his crown, but it was otherwise with the Emperor of Austria. He, it is said, was much hurt on learning that Napoleon intended to tarnish the splendour of an order founded by one of his ancestors, and highly valued by the princes of his house.

In spite of the numerous congratulations which I received, and the joy which I felt, I could not help inwardly blaming the creation of the order. I thought that the splendour which the Emperor wished to give it must lower that of the Legion of Honour, the institution of which had already produced such great results. Still, I congratulated myself on having been thought worthy to receive the new order. But whether Napoleon feared to lower the value of the Legion of Honour, or wished to please his future father-

in-law, he renounced his purpose, and, after his marriage with the Archduchess Marie-Louise, no more was heard of the order of the Three Fleeces.

The civil marriage was celebrated at Saint-Cloud, April 1, and the religious ceremony took place the next day in the chapel of the Louvre. I was present both at this and at the many festivities and rejoicings in honour of this event, which, as they said, was going to secure the crown on Napoleon's head, and which, on the contrary, actually contributed so much to his fall.

CHAPTER VIII

THE time was drawing near when Marshal Masséna was to go to Portugal, and the troops which were to compose his army were already assembled in great numbers in the south-west of Spain. As I was the only one of his aides-de-camp who had ever been in the Peninsula, he decided that I should go on in front to establish his headquarters at Valladolid. I left Paris on April 15 with a sad presentiment that I was going to make a disagreeable campaign in all ways. This seemed to be justified at the outset, for one of the wheels of the post-chaise in which I was travelling with my servant Woirland broke when we were a few leagues from Paris, and we had to walk on to the post at Longjumeau. It was a holiday, and we lost more than twelve hours. Wishing to make them up by travelling night and day, I was rather tired when I got to Bayonne. Beyond that town one could not travel in a carriage; we had therefore to ride post; and, to complete our troubles, the weather, which was magnificent when I left France, suddenly turned to rain, and the Pyrenees were covered with snow. I was very soon wet through and worn out, but there was nothing to do but to go on.

I am not superstitious; but at the moment when I left French soil, and was crossing the Bidassoa to enter Spain, an incident happened which struck me as an evil omen. A huge hideous black jackass, with rough and shaggy coat, was standing in the middle of the bridge, apparently disputing our passage. The outrider, who was a little in front of us, administered a sharp cut with his whip to make it get out of the way, when the animal in a fury threw itself upon the man's horse and bit it savagely, lashing out all the time at

Woirland and myself, who had come up to the rescue. The blows which we all three dealt to the infernal beast, so far from making him let go, seemed to excite him still further; and I really do not know how the ridiculous fight would have ended but for the help of the custom-house officers, who pricked the donkey's rump with their spiked sticks. My melancholy anticipations were certainly justified by the event, for my two campaigns in the Peninsula were exceedingly laborious. I was twice wounded without obtaining any reward, and scarcely any mark of kindness from Masséna.

After crossing the Bidassoa and reaching Irun there was no more security. Officers bearing despatches had to be escorted by a picket of the so-called Burgos gendarmerie, which had been formed of picked men in the town of that name, and had the special duty of protecting the communications. To this end there was at every posting-station a detachment in an entrenched block-house. The gendarmes, men in the prime of life, had very severe service for five years, and lost heavily, since it it was war to the death between them and the Spanish insurgents. It was raining hard as I left Irun. After some hours' march through the mountains, as I was reaching the little town of Montdragon, I heard a brisk musketry fire about half a league ahead. I stopped to consider. If I went forward it might be to fall into the hands of the bandits, with whom the country was swarming. On the other hand, if an officer bearing despatches turned back every time he heard a musket-shot it would take him several months to go the shortest journey. So I went on, and soon came upon the corpse of a French officer. The poor man, on his way from Madrid to Paris with letters from King Joseph to the Emperor, had just changed horses at Montdragon. He was not two cannon-shots from the station when he and his escort received an almost point-blank discharge from a group of bandits hidden behind a rock. The officer had several bullets through his body, and two of the gendarmes in his escort were wounded. If he had started a quarter of an hour later from Montdragon, I should undoubtedly have been

the one to fall into the ambush. This looked promising, and I had still more than one hundred leagues to traverse through provinces all up in arms against us. The attack at the very gates of Montdragon had put the little garrison of the town on the alert, and they had started in pursuit of the brigands. These, delayed in their march by their wish to carry off three of their men, who had been wounded by the gendarmes, were quickly overtaken and forced to escape into the mountains, leaving their wounded behind. These last were shot.

My experience in the former Spanish campaign had taught me that the most favourable moment for an officer who has a difficult country to traverse is just after one of these attacks, when the brigands, in their fear of being pursued, are in a hurry to get out of the way. I was therefore getting ready to proceed, but the officer in command of the place objected—first, because he had just learnt that the famous guerrilla leader, Mina, had appeared in the neighbourhood; and, secondly, because the night was drawing on, and by the Emperor's order escorts were directed to start only in daylight. This commandant was a Piedmontese who had long served in the French army, and was distinguished for unwonted intelligence and courage. The insurgents were extremely afraid of him, and, except for a few ambuscades, which it was impossible to foresee, he had, by employing address and vigour in turn, got the whole district in hand. I will instance each quality, which will give you some idea of the kind of war which we had to wage in Spain, though plenty of the educated class were on our side.

The parson of Montdragon was one of the fiercest opponents of the French. When, however, Napoleon passed through the town on his way back to Paris, in January 1809, the reverend gentleman, like all the rest of the inhabitants, went in front of the post-house to have a look at the Emperor. The commandant caught sight of him, went straight up to him, took him by the hand, and, leading him to the Emperor, said, loud enough for everyone to hear, 'I have the honour to present to your Majesty the curate of this town, one of the most devoted servants of your brother King Joseph.'

Napoleon, taking what the wily Piedmontese said as sound currency, received the clergyman most kindly, and thus he found himself against his will compromised in presence of his whole flock. That very evening, as he was going home, he was shot in the arm! He knew his compatriots too well not to understand that if the French were not victorious in the struggle his fate was sealed. From that moment he declared openly for them, and, at the head of the partisans on King Joseph's side, known as *Joséphins*, he rendered us useful service.

Not long before I passed through Montdragon the same commandant had shown great courage. He had had to send the greater part of his garrison away to guard an expected convoy of provisions, and when he had a few hours later to furnish escorts to some officers bearing despatches he had but a score of soldiers left. It was market-day, and the market-place was full of country folks. The postmaster, one of our bitterest foes, harangued them, bidding them profit by the weakness of the French garrison to cut their throats. At last the crowd made for the house, whither the commandant had retired with his small reserve. An impetuous attack was met by a vigorous defence, but our men would have given way in the end. Then the commandant ordered the door to be opened, sallied out with his little force, went straight up to the postmaster and ran him through the heart, then had the body dragged into the house and placed on the balcony. This vigorous action was followed by a well-delivered volley, whereupon the crowd fled in terror. That evening the garrison returned, and the commandant had the postmaster's body hung on the public gibbet as an example; nor, though he had many friends and relations in the town, did anyone lift a finger.

Next morning I started at daybreak. To my disgust, the Spanish postilion who was leading stopped under the gallows and lashed with his whip the corpse which was hanging there. I reproved the scoundrel sharply, but he answered, laughing: 'It is my postmaster; when he was alive he gave me many a cut with a whip, and I don't mind giving him

back a few '—a very characteristic instance of the vindictive disposition of the lower class of Spaniards.

I got to Vittoria drenched through, and so feverish that I had to stop with General Séras, for whom I brought despatches. You will remember that he was the general who had made me sergeant ten years before, after the affair between the Bercheny detachment and the Barco Hussars.[1] He welcomed me warmly, and wished me to rest there for a time; but my errand would not bear delay, and I rode on next day in spite of my fever, which was not improved by the frightful weather. That day I crossed the Ebro at Miranda, where the spurs of the Pyrenees end, and where ended then the power of the famous partisan leaders named Mina.

The first of these *guerrilleros* was the son of a rich farmer near Montdragon, and was studying for holy orders when the War of Independence broke out in 1808. It is a fact, not generally known, that at that time many Spaniards, with some of the secular clergy at their head, wishing to shake off the yoke of the Inquisition and the monks, not only longed for the continuance of Joseph on the throne, but even joined our troops in trying to beat off the insurgents. Young Mina was of this number; he levied a company of 'friends of order,' and made war on the bandits. By a curious reaction, however, Mina, captivated by the adventurous life, became an insurgent himself, and fought us desperately in Biscay and Navarre, at the head of a band which at this time amounted to near 10,000 men. The commandant of Montdragon managed at last to seize him at a wedding festivity in the house of a relation; and Napoleon put him into prison at Vincennes. Mina was an able and straightforward guerrilla chief. When he returned in 1814 he opposed Ferdinand VII., for whom he had fought so well; and when about to be arrested he escaped to America, where he got mixed up in Mexican revolutions, and was shot. During his confinement at Vincennes the insurgents took for their chief an uncle of his. This man, a rough blacksmith, of bloodthirsty disposi-

[1 Vol. i. p. 58.]

tion, and no ability,[1] gained great influence solely through his name. The Seville Junta sent some educated officers to direct this new chief, who did us a great deal of damage.

I entered now upon the vast and dreary plains of Old Castile. At first sight an ambush seems quite impossible in this treeless and mountainless country; but it is so undulating that this apparent security was deceptive. The hollows between the frequent hillocks allowed bands of insurgents to hide, and pour forth unawares upon French detachments, marching with confidence through a country where they could apparently see four or five leagues all round them and discover no enemy. A few disasters had made our men more cautious, and they no longer crossed the plains without searching the hollows with skirmishers. This precaution, however, was not available in the case of such escorts—five or six gendarmes—as were allowed to officers bearing despatches; so that many of them lost their lives on the plains of Castile. Still, I liked better to travel in this open country than in the mountains of Biscay and Navarre, where rocks command the roads; and the inhabitants are likewise far more enterprising than the Castilians.

I went on my way without accident as far as the little town of Briviesca; but between that place and Burgos we saw twenty mounted Spaniards appear suddenly round a low hill. They fired several shots at us without effect; then my escort, my servant, and I drew our swords, and went forward without deigning to reply to the enemy, who, judging from our resolute attitude that we were the kind of people to defend ourselves vigorously, went off in another direction.

At Burgos I put up with General Dorsenne, commanding a brigade of the guard, for in the actual state of the country nearly every town and village was occupied by our troops. The roads only were insecure, and therefore those who, like me, had to travel with small escorts ran the most danger. Of this I had a fresh proof next day, when between Palencia

[1 Readers of Napier will think this judgment somewhat too depreciatory. 'Mina y Espoz,' though not equal to 'the student' Mina, did some good service.]

and Dueñas I fell in with an officer and twenty-five men of the Young Guard escorting a chest of money for the garrison at Valladolid. The escort was evidently inadequate, for the *guerrilleros* of the neighbourhood had assembled to the number of 150, and were just attacking the detachment. On seeing my escort galloping up they took us for the advanced guard of a cavalry corps, and stopped short in their onset. But one of them, ascending a hillock, whence he got a distant view, called out that no French troops were in sight, whereupon the brigands advanced boldly towards the tempting treasure-waggon. I naturally took command of the small united forces, and bade the officer of the guard not to fire till I gave the word. Most of the enemy had dismounted, the better to get hold of the money-bags, and were poor fighters with muskets; many had only pistols. I had placed my infantry behind the wagon, and as soon as the Spaniards were within twenty paces I made them come out, and gave the order to fire. This was obeyed with terrible precision; the leader of the Spaniards and a dozen of his men dropped. The rest bolted at full speed towards their horses, which some of their friends were holding two hundred yards off; but as they were mounting I ordered the infantry and the six gendarmes to charge them, my servant Woirland joining. This little band of brave fellows, catching the bandits in disorder, killed thirty of them, and captured fifty horses, which they sold that evening at Dueñas. I had only two wounded, and those slightly. The officer and men of the Young Guard had shown much courage; if I had had only recruits we might well have suffered a disaster, especially as I was myself too weak to take part in the charge. The excitement had increased my fever, and I was forced to spend the night at Dueñas. Next day, the commandant of that place, in consequence of what had happened, sent a whole company to escort the treasure to Valladolid, and I went with them, being hardly able to sit my horse, and quite unable to gallop. The details I have given may serve further to show you the danger to which officers were exposed who were compelled by their duties to post through the insurgent provinces.

My mission being discharged, I hoped to get some rest at Valladolid; but tribulation of a new kind awaited me. Junot, the Duke of Abrantes, commanding one of the corps which was to form part of Masséna's army, had been for some months at Valladolid, quartered in the huge palace built by Charles V., an ancient house, but in perfect preservation and comfortably furnished. I made no doubt that on hearing of the immediate arrival of the marshal to take supreme command, the Duke of Abrantes would at once leave this old palace of the kings, and take up his quarters in one of the handsome houses which the town contained. To my surprise, however, Junot (whose wife, the duchess, had come to Valladolid, and held a most elegant little court there) informed me that he meant only to surrender half his palace to Masséna. He was sure, he said, that the marshal would be too polite to turn the duchess out, especially as the palace was large enough to lodge both staffs comfortably.

To understand the dilemma in which this statement placed me, you must know that Masséna was accustomed to take everywhere, and even to the wars, with him a lady named N——. So attached was he to her that he only accepted the command of the Army of Portugal on condition that the Emperor would let him take her. Being of a gloomy and misanthropic turn, and preferring to live alone, secluded in his own rooms and away from his staff, Masséna needed sometimes the distraction afforded by a lively and witty companion. In this way Mme N—— suited him perfectly, for she was a clever, kindly, and amiable woman, who, besides, quite understood the awkwardness of her position. It was impossible that she could lodge under the same roof with the Duchess of Abrantes, a descendant of the Comneni, and full of family pride.[1] On the other hand, it was not fitting that the marshal should be quartered in a private house, while his subordinate was in the palace. So I was obliged to explain the state of things to Junot, who, however, would only laugh,

[1 Mme Junot's descent on the mother's side seems to have been somewhat legendary. Her father, M. Permon, was a clerk in the victualling department, and made his fortune with Rochambeau's army in America.]

and say that he and Masséna had often lodged in one cottage in Italy, and that the ladies might settle it among themselves.

In despair I spoke to the duchess herself. She was a woman of quick wit, and decided to go and establish herself in the town. Junot opposed this obstinately, much to my annoyance; but what could I do against a commander-in-chief? Things were still in this position when, after being several days in bed with fever, I got a message by express to say that the marshal was coming in a few hours. I had at a venture taken a house for him in the town, and, weak as I was, would have mounted my horse to meet him and let him know what had happened, but his mules had gone so quickly that on going downstairs I found the marshal himself, leading in Mme N——. I was beginning to explain my difficulties, when in rushed Junot, bringing the duchess with him. He fell into Masséna's arms; then before all the staff he kissed Mme N——'s hand, and introduced his wife. Imagine the ladies' confusion! They stood like stones, without a word. The marshal had the wit to restrain himself; but he was deeply hurt when the Duchess of Abrantes, pleading indisposition, left the dining-room just as Junot was leading in Mme N——.

These details, which at first sight may seem superfluous, are here related because the scene had serious results. The marshal never quite forgave Junot for refusing to give up the whole palace to him, and for putting him in a false position before a number of general officers. Junot, on his side, made common cause with Marshal Ney and General Reynier, the commanders of the two other corps forming with his the Grand Army of Portugal. This gave rise to mischievous differences, which had a great deal to do with the unlucky result of the campaign of 1810 and 1811, and the unhappy effects which flowed from that, and weighed so heavy on the destiny of the French Empire. So true is it that causes apparently trivial or ridiculous often lead to great calamities. General Kellermann, commanding in Valladolid, reported to Masséna all the trouble which I had taken to spare him a part of

this unpleasantness; but he bore me a grudge for it all the same.

In due course the marshal's staff arrived at Valladolid. It was pretty numerous, since, peace appearing to be settled for some time in Germany, officers desirous of promotion had asked as a favour to be allowed to fight in Portugal; and those who had the most interest got on to the staff of the general-in-chief. With his extensive command at a great distance from France, he required many officers, and his staff accordingly consisted of fourteen aides-de-camp and four orderly officers.

The promotion of Sainte-Croix to the rank of general had been a misfortune for Masséna. In him he lost a wise counsellor at a moment when, growing old, and left to his own resources, he had to oppose a foe like the Duke of Wellington, and get obeyed by lieutenants, one of whom was a marshal as well as himself, while the other two, with the title of commander-in-chief, had long been used to take their orders directly from the Emperor. Although Sainte-Croix was with the Army of Portugal in command of a brigade of dragoons, his new duties did not allow him to be constantly by Masséna's side. The marshal's character, once so firm, had become in a high degree irresolute, and one soon missed the able man who during the Wagram campaign had been the life and soul of his staff. The marshal having no longer a colonel as senior aide-de-camp, the office was filled by the senior major. This was Pelet, a good comrade, a brave man, a learned mathematician, but one who had never commanded troops, for on leaving the Polytechnic School he had been placed in the corps of mapping engineers. This corps while accompanying the armies was non-combatant, and acted, to tell the truth, merely as an understudy to the engineers. It is human nature to admire what one can least do one's self, and thus Masséna, whose education was very incomplete, had an immense respect for mapping engineers who could lay nice plans before him, and had had several on his staff. Pelet had been with him in this capacity at Naples in 1806, and in Poland in 1807. He behaved with courage in the

campaign of 1809, and was wounded on the bridge at Ebersberg, earning thereby his promotion to major. He was present at the battles, and often risked himself in mapping the island of Lobau and the Danube. Good service as this doubtless was, it could not give Pelet practice in the art of war, especially when it was a question of commanding 70,000 men against Wellington in a difficult conntry. Yet he became Masséna's chief adviser even when neither Ney, nor Reynier, nor Junot, nor any of the other generals were consulted. Sainte-Croix, no doubt, was an extraordinary genius who understood the art of war on a great scale by intuition without having ever held an important command. Miracles of this kind are rare; and Masséna, after he had got into the way of yielding to the inspiration of his senior aide-de-camp, put his lieutenants out of heart and paved the way to disobedience which led us into disaster. These disasters would have been still greater if the name and fame of Masséna had not survived to act as a caution to the English leader. So afraid was Wellington of making any mistake in presence of the conqueror of Zurich, that he always acted with the utmost circumspection. The prestige of his name had influenced even the Emperor. Napoleon never considered enough that he himself had been the prime author of the success gained at Wagram, and when he set Masséna the difficult task of going five hundred leagues away from France to conquer Portugal it was through a too firm belief that he had preserved all his vigour of mind and body. This judgment may appear to you too severe, but it will be confirmed when I relate the events of the two campaigns.

Pelet, though at that time not up to Masséna's requirements, gained much in practical soldiership, especially during the Russian campaign, where he commanded a regiment of infantry. He was then serving under Marshal Ney; and though Ney had conceived a great antipathy to him, Pelet was able to recover his esteem. When Ney, cut off from the Russians by the rest of the army during the retreat from Moscow, found himself in a most dangerous position, it was Pelet who proposed to cross the half-frozen Dnieper—a

perilous enterprise, but one which, being resolutely executed, saved Ney's corps. This good advice made Pelet's fortune in a military sense; he was appointed by the Emperor general to the grenadiers of the old guard, and fought valiantly at their head in Saxony in 1813, and the next year in France; also at Waterloo. Afterwards he became director of the Ordnance Office, but in his excessive attachment to scientific officers he too often took on his staff map-draughtsmen who knew nothing of manœuvring. He has written several works of good repute, especially an account of the Austrian campaign of 1809, the clearness of which has unluckily been injured by theoretic discussions.

I was Masséna's second aide-de-camp; the third was Major Casabianca, a Corsican by birth, and related to the Emperor on the mother's side. Educated, able, and very brave, this officer had been attached to Masséna by Napoleon himself; so Masséna, while paying him much attention, often kept him away from the army under the pretext of honouring him. He sent him to the Emperor with the news of the capitulation of Ciudad Rodrigo, and when he came back, a month later, sent him back to Paris to announce the capture of Almeida, and, on his rejoining us as we entered Portugal, gave him the duty of reporting the position of the armies to the minister. He did not finally come back to us till the end of the campaign. In the Russian campaign he was colonel of the 11th Infantry in the same army corps with my own regiment. He was killed in a fight which he had undertaken fruitlessly and to no purpose.

The fourth aide-de-camp was Major the Count of Ligniville. He belonged to one of four distinguished families, known as the great team of Lorraine, which spring from the same house as the present sovereigns of Austria. After the battle of Wagram the Emperor Francis II. sent a flag of truce to inquire if any harm had happened to his cousin the Count of Ligniville. He had such a passion for soldiering that at fifteen he ran away and enlisted in the 13th Dragoons. He was severely wounded at Marengo, was promoted officer on the battle-field, and served brilliantly in the campaigns of

Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland. In 1809 he passed from the staff of General Becker to that of Masséna. I have told how he got into trouble with the marshal by helping me in supporting the interests of the brave servants who had driven him on the battle-fields of Wagram and Znaym. The marshal's dislike increased during the campaign in Portugal, and Ligniville went back to the 13th Dragoons, of which he soon became colonel. After the Restoration he became general, married well, and was living happily, when he ruined himself by unsound speculations. He was much depressed by this, and died soon after, much to my regret.

The fifth aide-de-camp was Major Barain, who had lost an arm at Wagram, but persisted in serving as aide-de-camp, though he could do hardly any active service; a good fellow but taciturn. My brother was the sixth. The following were captains: M. Porcher de Richebourg, a capable officer, but with no great taste for military life. He left the army when his father died, and succeeded him in the Chamber of Peers. Captain Barral, nephew of the Archbishop of Tours, had many of the qualities which make a good soldier, but they were neutralised by his extreme shyness; he retired as captain. Captain Cavalier belonged to the same corps as Pelet and acted as his secretary. Captain Despenoux came of a legal family, and had inherited from them an extremely calm temperament, only becoming animated when going into action. The fatigues of the Portuguese campaign were almost too much for him, and he succumbed to the climate of Russia. He was found in a bivouac frozen stiff. Captain Renique was in particular favour with Masséna, but, being a good comrade, he did not presume upon it. I took him into my regiment when I became colonel of the 23rd Chasseurs, and he left the army after the retreat from Moscow. Captain d'Aguesseau, a descendant of the celebrated chancellor, was one of the wealthy young men who, at the Emperor's instance, took to military life without considering their physical strength. He was a brave man but very delicate, and the incessant rain of the winter 1810–11 injured his health so far that he died on the banks of the Tagus.

Captain Prosper Masséna, whose noble conduct at Wagram I have already related, was a brave and excellent young man, and displayed the greatest friendship towards me. The marshal often associated him with me on difficult missions. After long hesitation, his father, having no command in the Russian campaign, ended by keeping him at home. When the marshal died in 1817, Prosper was so deeply affected that he was seized with violent fits. I was then in exile, and when I returned, and went to pay my respects to the marshal's widow, she sent for her son. His emotion at seeing me again was such that he again fell seriously ill; his health was hopelessly broken, and he soon departed this life, leaving his title and part of his fortune to his younger brother, Victor.

The youngest and the junior in rank of all the aides-de-camp was Victor Oudinot, son of the marshal. He had been the Emperor's page, and had accompanied him in this capacity at the battle of Wagram. Now he had just entered Masséna's staff as lieutenant, being but twenty years old. To-day he is lieutenant-general. We shall hear of him again in the course of my story; I will now merely say that he gained the reputation of being one of the best horsemen of his time.

Besides the fourteen aides-de-camp, the marshal had four orderly officers: Captain Beaufort d'Hautpoul, of the Engineers; Lieutenant Perron, a Piedmontese, ugly, but witty and jovial—he kept us all merry during the winter of 1810, by a theatre of marionettes which he got up, and which the marshal and generals sometimes attended for their amusement. He died at the battle of Montmirail, just as he was leaping astride on to a Russian gun. The next was Lieutenant de Briqueville, a man distinguished by bravery, carried to the point of imprudence, as he showed when fighting in 1815, at the head of his regiment, between Versailles and Rocquencourt, when he got entangled between two park walls, losing many men, and receiving three sabre-cuts on the head.. He entered the Chamber as deputy for Caen, and went into violent opposition, ultimately

dying in a condition of mental excitement. Masséna's fourth orderly officer was Octave de Ségur, son of the count. Educated, exquisitely polite, of an affable disposition and calm valour, he was beloved by the whole staff. In rank, he was the junior officer, though nearly thirty years old. He left the Polytechnic School in the days of the Directory, and held the post of Sub-Prefect of Soissons under the Consulate, but resigned in disgust at the judicial murder of the Duke of Enghien, and enlisted in the 6th Hussars. He was wounded and taken prisoner in 1809 at Raab, in Hungary, and when exchanged asked leave to serve as sub-lieutenant in the Portuguese campaign, where he did brilliant service. When captain in the 8th Hussars, he was taken prisoner in Russia, and, as son of our former ambassador, was treated with much consideration by Catherine II. After two years' residence at Saratoff, in the Volga, he returned to France in 1814, and was on the staff of the guard under Louis XVIII. He died, still young, in 1816.

CHAPTER IX

ALTHOUGH the Minister of War had assured the marshal that everything was ready for the campaign, it was nothing of the kind, and the commander-in-chief had to stay a fortnight at Valladolid, looking after the departure of the troops and the transport of stores and ammunition. At last the headquarters were removed to Salamanca, where my brother and I were quartered with the Count of Montezuma, a lineal descendant of the last Emperor of Mexico. The marshal wasted three more weeks at Salamanca waiting for General Reynier's corps. These delays, while hurtful to us, were all in favour of the English.

The last Spanish town towards the Portuguese frontier is Ciudad Rodrigo, a fortress, if the strength of its works alone be considered, of the third class, but having great importance owing to its position between Spain and Portugal, in a district with few roads, and those very difficult for large guns and the apparatus of a siege train. It was, however, absolutely necessary that the French should get possession of the place. With this resolve, Masséna left Salamança about the middle of June, and caused Rodrigo to be invested by Ney's corps, while Junot covered the operations from the attacks of an Anglo-Portuguese army, which was encamped a few leagues from us, near the Portuguese fortress of Almeida, under Lord Wellington. Ciudad Rodrigo was defended by a brave old Spanish general of Irish origin, Andrew Herrasti.

The French, unable to believe that the English would have come so near the place just to see it captured under their eyes, expected a battle. None took place; and on July 10, the Spanish guns having been silenced, a part of the town

being on fire, and the counterscarp overthrown by the explosion of a powder magazine for a space of thirty-six feet, while the ditch was filled with the ruins and the breach widely opened, Masséna resolved to give the signal for the assault. To this end Marshal Ney formed a column of 1,500 volunteers, who were to mount the breach first. Assembled at the foot of the rampart, these brave men were awaiting the signal to attack, when an officer expressed his fear that the breach was not yet practicable. Thereupon three of our soldiers mounted to the top of it, looked into the town, made such examination as was useful, and fired their muskets, rejoining their comrades without being wounded, although this bold feat was performed in broad daylight. Kindled by this example, the assaulting column advanced at a run and was on the point of dashing into the town when General Herrasti capitulated. The defence of the garrison had been very fine, but the Spanish troops composing it had good reason to complain of their desertion by the English, who had merely sent reconnoitring parties towards our camp, without attempting any serious diversion. The skirmishes resulting from these nearly always turned out to our advantage. One of them was so creditable to our infantry, that the English historian Napier has been unable to refrain from doing homage to the valour of the men who took part in it. On July 11 the English General Craufurd, who was operating in the country between Ciudad Rodrigo and Villa de Puerco, at the head of six squadrons, having perceived at day-break a company of French grenadiers, about 120 strong, marching in the open, ordered two squadrons to attack them. But the French had time to form square, and were so cool that the enemy's officers could hear Captain Gouache and his sergeant exhorting their people to take good aim. The cavalry charged with ardour, but received such a terrible volley that they left the ground piled with dead, and had to retire. Seeing two English squadrons repulsed by a handful of French, Colonel Talbot advanced furiously with four squadrons of the 14th Dragoons and attacked Captain Gouache. Firmly awaiting the charge, he ordered a volley at point-blank range,

which killed Colonel Talbot and some thirty of his men; after which the brave Gouache retired in good order towards the French camp without the English general venturing to attack again. This brilliant affair was much talked of in the two armies.[1] When the Emperor heard of it he raised Captain Gouache to major, promoted the other officers, and gave eight decorations in the company.

After having mentioned a fact so glorious for the French arms, I ought to report one no less creditable to the Spaniards. The *guerrillero* Don Julian Sanchez, having voluntarily shut himself in Ciudad Rodrigo with his two hundred horsemen, did good service by making frequent attacks on our trenches. At length, when the want of forage caused the presence of 200 horses to be a trouble to the garrison, Sanchez left the town with his men one dark night, and, crossing the bridge over the Agreda, the approaches to which Ney had omitted to block, fell on our outposts, killed several men, pierced our lines, and went off to join the English army.

The siege of Rodrigo nearly cost me my life; not by the enemy's fire, but by reason of an illness which I contracted in the following manner. The neighbourhood of the town, being infertile, is thickly inhabited, and there had been much difficulty in finding quarters for the marshal near the trenches. Finally he was put into an isolated building situated in a spot commanding the town and suburbs. As the siege promised to last long, and there was no lodging for the staff close by, we hired, at our own cost, some planks and beams, and erected a large room, where we were sheltered from sun and rain, and slept on boards, which, though rough, kept us clear of the damp rising from the soil. But the marshal was inconvenienced from the outset in his stone building by an intolerable stench, and on inquiry it was found that the building had been used to keep sheep in. Masséna proceeded to set his affections on our extempore house; but, not liking to use his authority to eject us, came

[1 See Napier, xi. ch. 4. He relates the incident in much the same terms, only making the strength of the French rather greater and the English loss a good deal less.]

to see us on some pretext or other, and exclaimed as he entered: 'Well, my lads, you have a nice place here! May I beg for a corner to put my bed and desk in?' This, as we saw, was sharing with the lion, and we left our excellent abode in haste, to take up our quarters in the old sheep-stall. It was paved with small stones, their interstices clogged with filth, and highly uncomfortable to lie on, from the want of long straw in Spain.[1] Forced thus to lie on the bare ground and inhale the fetid exhalations rising from it, we all became more or less unwell before long. I was much the worst; for in these warm countries fever always tries most those who have already suffered from it, and my Valladolid attack returned in an aggravated form. Still I resolved to take my share in the siege, and remained on duty. Duty was often pretty laborious, especially when we had to carry orders in the night to our division on the left bank of the Agreda, which was carrying out the necessary works for the reduction of the Franciscan convent, used by the enemy as a bastion. In order to reach this point from the headquarters without coming under the fire of the place, it was necessary to make a long wind to a bridge which our troops had constructed, or else cross by a ford. One night, when all was ready for the assault, and Ney only awaited Masséna's order to give the signal, it happened to be my turn for duty, and I had to take the order. It was a dark, hot night; I was in a high fever, and streaming with perspiration when I reached the ford. I had only once crossed it in daylight, but the dragoon orderly who was with me had crossed it several times, and offered to guide me. This he did very well till he got to the middle, where it was not more than two or three feet deep; but then he went wrong in the darkness, and our horses, stepping on big slippery stones, fell and we were in the water. There was no fear of drowning; we scrambled on to the bank with ease; but we were wet through. In any other circumstances I should only have laughed at this involuntary bath; but, though not cold, the water checked the perspiration, and I was seized with a shivering fit. I reached the convent and

[1 *Cf.* vol. i. p. 101.]

passed the night in the open air beside Marshal Ney. The attacking column was commanded by a major named Lefrançois, whom I knew well. The day before he had shown me a letter from his sweetheart announcing that her father agreed to their marriage as soon as Lefrançois was lieutenant-colonel. It was with this object that he had asked permission to lead the storming party. The attack was brisk, the defence stubborn. After three hours' fighting our troops remained in possession of the convent, but poor Lefrançois was slain. His loss was much felt in the army, and grieved me deeply.

In hot countries sunrise is usually preceded by piercing cold. I was the more sensitive to it that day for having passed the night in wet clothes, so that when I returned to headquarters I was much out of sorts. Still I had to report the result of the attack to Masséna before getting into dry things. He was at that moment taking his morning walk with General Fririon, his chief of staff. In their interest in my story, or wishing to get a closer view, they gradually drew near the town, and we were not more than a cannon-shot away when the marshal let me go and rest. Hardly had I gone fifty paces from them when a gigantic shell, launched from the ramparts, fell close to them. At the fearful noise of its explosion I turned round, and, seeing nothing of the marshal and the general, who were concealed by a cloud of dust and smoke, I thought they were killed, and ran to the place. To my astonishment I found them alive and none the worse, save for some contusions from the stones which the bursting shell had thrown up. They were, however, both covered with earth, especially Masséna. He had lost an eye shooting [1] some years before, and his remaining eye was so full of sand that he could not see his way, while the bruises he had received from the stones prevented his walking. It was necessary to get him out of range, however, and, as he was small and thin, I managed, ill as I was, to take him on my shoulders and carry him out of reach of the enemy's shot. I went on and told my comrades, and they brought the marshal

[1 See p. 193.]

in without the men finding out the danger which their commander-in-chief had run.

The fatigue and excitement of the last twenty-four hours increased my fever a good deal; still I braced myself up, and contrived to hold out till the surrender of Ciudad Rodrigo, on July 9.[1] But as from this day forward the excitement which had kept me up so far had nothing more to feed on, I must needs give in to the fever. This became so alarming that I had to be carried to the one house in the town which the French shells had left intact. It was the only time that I have been seriously ill without being wounded, but this time my life was despaired of, and I was left at Ciudad Rodrigo while the army crossed the Coa and marched on Almeida. This place not being more than four leagues as the crow flies from Ciudad Rodrigo, I could hear from my sick-bed the uproar of the cannon, and every report made me writhe with rage. Often did I try to rise, and the fruitlessness of the attempts, by showing me how utterly weak I was, increased my wretchedness. My brother and my comrades, kept by their duty at Almeida, were far away, and my solitude was only broken by the short visits of Dr. Blancheton, who, clever as he was, could only treat me very inefficiently for want of medicaments. The air of the town was tainted by the stench of many thousands of corpses which lay unburied among the rubbish of the ruined houses. A temperature of more than eighty-five degrees, aggravating these causes of unhealthiness, soon brought typhus. Both the garrison and such of the inhabitants as had remained in the place to look after what was left of their property suffered terribly. I was left to the care of my servant, and, with all his zeal, he could not get me what I required. My illness increased and I became delirious. I remember that there were in my room some large pictures representing the four quarters of the earth. Africa, which was right in front of my bed, had at her feet a huge lion, the eyes of which seemed to be fixed on me, while I could not take mine from them. At last one day I thought I saw him move, and, wishing to anticipate his attack, I tottered up,

[1] July 11, according to Napier.]

took my sword, and, striking with edge and point, I hewed the lion to pieces. After this truly Quixotic feat I fell half-fainting on the floor, where the doctor found me. He had all the pictures removed from the room, after which I grew quieter. My lucid moments were not less terrible; it was painful to think of my melancholy situation and utter loneliness. Death on the battlefield seemed sweet to me compared to that which I expected, and I regretted not to have fallen like a soldier. To die in a bed of fever while there was fighting near me seemed to me a horrible, almost a shameful thing.

I had been in this dreadful position for a month, when on August 26, towards nightfall, a fearful explosion was heard. The earth trembled till I thought the house was coming down. It was the fortress of Almeida which had just blown up through the explosion of a huge powder magazine, and the disturbance was distinctly felt at Rodrigo, from which one may judge the effects which it had produced in Almeida itself. The unlucky place was destroyed from top to bottom; not six houses remained standing. Six hundred of the garrison were killed, and many wounded; some fifty French employed on the siege works were struck by splinters of stone. In pursuance of instructions from his Government, Lord Wellington, with the view of sparing English blood at the cost of that of his allies, after having entrusted the defence of Ciudad Rodrigo to the Spanish troops, who had just surrendered, had left that of Almeida to the Portuguese, Colonel Cox, the governor, being the only Englishman in the place. That brave officer, not suffering himself to be intimidated by the horrible disaster which had just destroyed almost all his means of resistance, proposed to the garrison to continue their defence behind the ruins of the city. But the Portuguese troops, terrified, and led away by their officers, especially by Bernardo Costa, the lieutenant-governor, and José Bareiros, commanding the artillery, refused, and Colonel Cox, being unsupported, was compelled to capitulate.

It has been said that the French commander had tam-

pered with the Portuguese officers, and that the explosion was brought about by their treason; but this is a mistake. The only cause of the fire was neglect on the part of the garrison, who, instead of fetching the powder barrels one by one from the cellars and shutting the door behind each, had been imprudent enough to roll a score of them at a time into the courtyard of the castle. It seems that a French shell falling on one of the barrels exploded it, and that the others forming a train right up to the middle of the magazine, caused the explosion which wrecked the town and injured the fortifications. However that may be, the English brought the two Portuguese officers to trial, Costa being condemned and shot, while Bareiros succeeded in escaping. These two officers were certainly not guilty of treason; at most they could be reproached with not having continued a hopeless defence, the only result of which could have been to preserve the ruins of Almeida for a few days longer, while the English army was tranquilly encamped two leagues from the place without making any movement to aid them.

After having thus got possession of Almeida, Marshal Masséna, not being able to establish himself among the ruins of the town, moved his headquarters to Fort Concepcion, on the Spanish frontier. The French [1] had destroyed part of the fortifications, but the buildings were sufficiently intact to afford lodging. There Masséna made preparations for his expedition to Lisbon. My brother and my comrades took advantage of this interval to come and see me. Their presence increased the soothing effect which the capture of Almeida had produced on my spirits. The fever disappeared, and in a few days I was convalescent. I was eager for change of air, and, with the aid of my brother and some of my friends, I contrived to ride the short distance to Fort Concepcion. My comrades, who had feared that they would never see me again, received me most affectionately; but the marshal, whom I had not seen since the day when I had carried him out of range of the guns of Rodrigo, never said

[1] Napier would seem to imply that Craufurd had blown up Fort Concepcion before retiring to the Coa.]

a word to me about my illness. After a fortnight in the fort in good air and able to rest, I recovered my full health, and was ready for the campaign in Portugal. Before relating the events of this famous and disastrous campaign I must briefly make you acquainted with what had taken place in the Peninsula since the Emperor left it in 1809.

CHAPTER X

WHILE Ney was holding the Asturias and Leon, Marshal Soult, who to the conquest of Corunna had added that of the port of Ferrol, concentrated his troops at Santiago, in Galicia, and made ready to invade Portugal. Under an illusion which turned out disastrous, Napoleon never understood the enormous difference which the fact of Spain and Portugal being in insurrection produced between the nominal state of the French troops in the Peninsula and the actual number of combatants which could be arrayed against the enemy. Thus the strength of the second corps under Soult amounted on paper to 47,000; but, after deducting the garrisons at Santander, Corunna, and Ferrol, the 8,000 men employed to maintain the communications and 12,000 sick, the number of those at present under arms did not exceed 25,000, and these were tired out with fighting all through the winter in a mountain country; were short of shoes, often of provisions; and had only broken-down horses to drag the artillery over the bad roads. It was with means so feeble as these that the Emperor ordered Marshal Soult to enter Portugal. It is true he reckoned on the valour of the second corps, almost wholly composed of veterans from Austerlitz and Friedland, and proposed an attack on Portugal from another side by Marshal Victor's corps, which was to advance from Andalusia and join Soult at Lisbon; but fortune did not endorse his calculation.[1]

On February 1, 1809, Soult, after informing Ney that he was leaving him to look after Galicia, marched towards the Minho. He tried to cross it near the fortified town

[[1] The remainder of this and much of the next chapter, which do not profess to give General Marbot's personal reminiscences, seem to be taken, often verbatim, from Napier (vi., chaps. 5 and 7; vii., chaps. 1 and 2).]

of Tuy, but the strength of the current and the fire of the Portuguese militia from the opposite bank rendered the attempt abortive. Then the marshal, with wonderful activity and vigour, chose a new line of operations, and, marching up the river, crossed it at Ribada-Via; occupied Orense; then, descending again, attacked and captured Tuy, making it his place of arms. He left there part of his artillery, his heavy baggage, his sick and wounded, guarded by a strong garrison, which reduced his force to 20,000 combatants, and with these he boldly advanced to Oporto.

This great town, the second in the kingdom, was in a state of complete anarchy. The bishop, having seized the sole command, had himself traced fortifications, and had brought in the country folk in great numbers to work at them. The people were living in a state of licence; the troops were insubordinate, the generals quarrelling among themselves; everything, in short, was in the utmost disorder. The Commission of Regency and the bishop were sworn foes; while the adherents of either side were assassinating the conspicuous men on the other. Such were their arrangements for opposing our army. But, though harassed by continual marching through swarms of insurgents, our army attacked the Spanish force, commanded by La Romana, and the Portuguese, under Sylveira, at Verin, defeating the former completely; while the second retreated beyond the Portuguese fortress of Chaves, which Soult captured. One of the chief inconveniences which we experienced in the Peninsula was that of guarding prisoners. A large number were taken at Chaves, and Soult, not knowing how to dispose of them, accepted their proposal to enter the French service, even though most of them had done the same thing in the time of Junot's expedition and ended by deserting.

The army next moved on to Braga, where there was a second and considerable Portuguese force, under General Freira. This unfortunate officer, seeing his advance-guard beaten by the French, was preparing to retreat, when his troops, consisting almost entirely of peasant levies, killed him with cries of treason. At the same moment the French

advance-guard having appeared at the gates of Braga, the population betook themselves to the prisons, where the persons suspected of favouring the French were shut up, and slaughtered them all. Meanwhile Marshal Soult had attacked the enemy's army, which, after a short but brisk resistance, was utterly routed. In passing through Braga the fugitives killed the *corregidor*, and began to set the town on fire; but, being pursued by the French troops, they set off in the direction of Oporto. The advantage gained by the capture of Braga was a good deal reduced by a loss which Soult incurred at the same time. The Portuguese general, Sylveira, having flung himself on the left flank of the French army while it was marching on Braga, had carried the town of Chaves, and captured 1,200 of our sick and 800 combatants. Ignorant of this annoying circumstance, Soult left Heudelet's division in Braga, and continued his march to Oporto. The enemy offered gallant resistance at the river Ave, but the passage was forced, the French general Jardon being killed, while the Portuguese, in a rage at their defeat, murdered their general, Vallongo. The divisions of Mermet, Merle, and Franceschi, being thus united on the left bank of the Ave, with the road to Oporto open, concentrated in front of the entrenchments which covered the town and the camp. These contained at least 40,000 men, half being regular troops, under Generals Lima and Pereiras, but the real authority was in the hands of the bishop, a hot-tempered man who swayed the multitudes as he liked. English and Portuguese historians have held him responsible for the murder of fifteen persons of high position, whom he was unwilling or unable to save from the fury of the people, exasperated by the sight of the French army.

Oporto is built on the right bank of the Douro, and commanded by lofty rocks, which at that time were garnished with 200 guns. A bridge of boats, 500 yards long, joined the town with the suburb of Villa Nova. Before attacking Marshal Soult wrote to the bishop entreating him to spare the great town the horrors of the siege. The Portuguese prisoner who was sent with the message was very near being

hanged. The bishop, however, entered into correspondence, but without ordering the fire from the ramparts to cease. Finally, fearing, as would appear, to fall a victim to the fury of the people, which he had himself fomented by giving false hopes of success, he refused to surrender. On March 28 the marshal, in order to withdraw the enemy's attention from the centre of the entrenchments, attacked their wings. Merle's division carried several fortified enclosures on the left, while Delaborde and Franceschi threatened the works to the right. While this was going on, some battalions having cried out that they wished to surrender, General Foy advanced incautiously, followed by his aide-de-camp. The aide-de-camp was killed; the general was made prisoner, stripped naked, and dragged into the town. The Portuguese detested General Loison, who had beaten them.[1] This general had some time back lost an arm, whence they had nicknamed him Mañeta. On seeing General Foy a prisoner, the populace of Oporto, thinking that it was Loison, began to shout: 'Kill him! kill Mañeta!' But Foy had the presence of mind to lift his two hands, and the mob, seeing its mistake, let him be taken to prison. The bishop, who had brought things to this crisis, lacked courage to face the danger, and, leaving to the generals the task of defending the town as best they could, fled across the river to the convent of La Serra, on the top of the steep hill which commands the suburb of Villa Nova, whence he was able in perfect safety to witness the horrors of the morrow's fight.

It was a fearful night for the inhabitants of Oporto. A violent storm broke out, and the soldiers and peasants fancied that in the roaring wind they heard the sound of the enemy's cannon-balls. In spite of all that the officers could do, a fire of cannon and small arms was opened all along the line, and their noise mingled with that of the thunder and the incessant bells. Throughout this frightful uproar the French, sheltered in the ditches against balls and bullets, were calmly awaiting the daylight to attack the place. By the morning of the 29th the weather had cleared, and our troops marched

[1 At Almeida and elsewhere in 1807.]

eagerly to the fight. The marshal, as he planned on the previous day, engaged first on the wings. The stratagem succeeded perfectly; the Portuguese generals weakened their centre out of all proportion in order to strengthen their flanks; and Marshal Soult, giving the order to beat the charge, hurled the French troops on that point. The impetuous attack of our soldiers carried the entrenchments, and, pushing on, they entered the two principal forts through the embrasures, killing or dispersing all who resisted. After this success several battalions took the wings in rear, while Marshal Soult ordered another column to advance upon the town and make for the port. Driven from its entrenchments, and cut at several points, the Portuguese army fled through the town in despair. Some reached Fort Sao Joao, on the bank of the Douro, seeking to cross the river by swimming or in boats. General Loison, pointing out the danger of this course, was murdered, and as the French continued to advance, the fugitives made another attempt to cross, most of them being drowned. Meanwhile fighting went on in the town; the column sent forward by the marshal had cleared the barricades which blocked the streets and reached the bridge, where more than 4,000 persons of every age and sex were struggling to cross. The Portuguese batteries on the further shore, catching sight of the French, opened a heavy fire, which did not reach our troops, but told heavily on this heaving mass, while a cavalry detachment in flight cut its way through the terrified crowd. The boats composing the bridge soon became loaded, and several of them sank. Thus the bridge was broken; those who were nearest to the openings were pushed in by the pressure of the crowd from behind, and the river was covered with floating corpses—to such an extent that boats were capsized by them, and many trying to cross in that way were drowned. A good number of the poor creatures were rescued by the French soldiers who first came up, while the Portuguese gunners had fired on their own countrymen. By the help of planks our men crossed the gaps in the bridge, and, reaching the right bank, carried the batteries and captured the suburb of Villa Nova,

securing thus the passage of the Douro. As the woes of the town seemed drawing to an end, news came that the bishop's guard, 200 in number, were holding his palace and firing through the windows. A summons to surrender being fruitless, the French broke in and put these myrmidons to the sword. So far our troops had acted according to the laws of war: the town and its inhabitants had been respected. As they returned, however, excited by the capture of the bishop's palace, our soldiers saw in the public place some thirty of their comrades, captured the day before, who had been horribly mutilated by the Portuguese, and of whom most were still alive. Exasperated at this horrible sight, the soldiers thought no more of anything save vengeance, and began to take fearful reprisals, which were only stopped, with much difficulty, by the efforts of the marshal, the officers, and many of the cooler heads among the men themselves. Ten thousand Portuguese are said to have been slain that day, including those killed in the entrenchments. Our own loss was not more than five hundred. To the universal satisfaction, General Foy was set free. As for the bishop, having seen the ruin of his ambitious projects—it was said that he wished, for his own benefit, to sever the northern provinces from the rest of the kingdom—he fled to Lisbon, where he not only became reconciled to the Commission of Regency and was received into that body, but was soon appointed Patriarch of Portugal.

The fall of Oporto gave Soult a solid base of operations, and replenished his supplies. As at Braga, he adopted a policy of conciliation, endeavoured to heal the misfortunes of war, and recalled the inhabitants who had fled. A curious result, which historians have not explained, and of which naturally the newspapers said little, followed from this course of action. The Portuguese could not forgive the House of Braganza for its flight to America; nor did they wish to become a dependency of Brazil or an English colony, which seemed the most likely alternatives. Accordingly they preposed to choose a king; and Soult's orderly rule after the previous anarchy had made him so popular that the leading men went to him suggesting that an independent government

should be formed, with himself at its head. Soult, regarding their plan with favour, began to appoint civil officials, raised a Portuguese legion, and managed so well that in a fortnight addresses came in from the captured towns, signed by thirty thousand persons of all classes, and expressing consent to the new order of things. The Duke of Rovigo states in his memoirs that Soult refused these proposals; but several of the generals who were then at Oporto have assured me that they were present at receptions where the Portuguese addressed him as 'your Majesty,' and that he accepted the title with much dignity. Finally, when I put a question on the subject to my old colonel and excellent friend General Peter Soult, the marshal's brother, he answered me frankly that the Emperor on sending his brother to Portugal had authorised him to employ every means to detach the country from the English alliance, and that when the crown was offered to him he considered this not merely the best but the only means of making the interests of Portugal identical with those of France, and therefore that, subject to the Emperor's approval, he made use of it. A further proof is, that instead of expressing any discontent with the marshal's action Napoleon extended his powers considerably, herein yielding only to the exigencies of the situation which made Marshal Soult indispensable. Is it true that Napoleon wrote to him, 'I remember nothing but your conduct at Austerlitz'? This point has never been cleared up. Marshal Bertrand told me that while talking with Napoleon at St. Helena he often tried to turn the conversation towards Soult's short-lived royalty, but that the Emperor would say nothing, from which Bertrand inferred that he had neither incited nor restrained him.

Originally, no doubt, the Emperor's idea was to unite the whole Peninsula into a single state under his brother Joseph; but when he realised that the mutual hatred of the Spanish and Portuguese made this impossible, he would, in his desire to detach Portugal from English influence at any cost, have consented to allow one of his lieutenants to wear the crown, and, Soult being the choice of the majority of the nation,

Bertrand thought that Napoleon would have made up his mind to endorse that choice. However that may be, as soon as the offer of the Portuguese to Soult was known in the army there was great excitement, the junior officers and the men who were very fond of the marshal having no fault to find with the plan except its supposed antagonism to the Emperor's wishes. As soon as it was known that the marshal would do nothing without the Emperor's consent, the great majority took his side and was ready to support his projects. Still a large number of senior officers were afraid that Soult's accession to the Portuguese throne would bind the emperor to maintain him there, and that the second corps would be left in the country to settle there after the Roman fashion, whereby they would be engaged in an endless war. Their scheme, therefore, was to make a truce with the English, and, after choosing a leader and appealing to the French troops in Spain, to return altogether to France and force the Emperor to conclude a peace.

This plan, which was inspired by the English Government,[1] was easier to form than to execute. It may be doubted whether all the armies and the mass of the French nation would have agreed to it. Steps were, however, taken to carry it out. The English General Beresford, marshal in the Portuguese army, was the soul of the plot, and carried on through an Oporto merchant named Viana a correspondence with the French malcontents, who were mean enough to suggest the arrest of Marshal Soult. As may be supposed, the discovery of this conspiracy put Marshal Soult into much perplexity; all the more so that he did not know the partners to it. His accustomed firmness, however, did not desert him.

[1 There appears to be no authority whatever for this statement. Certainly Napier, from whom, as has been said, all this is borrowed, suggests nothing of the kind, but speaks in terms no less severe than General Marbot's own of the conduct of the malcontents, which, however, he ascribes to the republican views held by some officers of high rank, and their consequent desire to reduce Napoleon's power.]

CHAPTER XI

WHILE Soult was attending to the administration of the conquered country, the English and Portuguese troops which Sir Arthur Wellesley and Marshal Beresford were bringing up from Lisbon and Coimbra were every day drawing nearer the Douro. General Sylveira, after retaking Chaves from the French, descended the Tamega to Amarante, and, capturing that village with its bridge, brought his army in rear of Soult. Generals Heudelet and Loison were despatched to this point, and drove Sylveira from Amarante; but Wellesley, with the intention of turning the French left, sent a strong Anglo-Portuguese force across the Douro in front of Lamego. These marched upon Amarante, and General Loison in spite of his orders to defend that town to the uttermost abandoned the only passage by which the French army could escape from its perilous situation. Seeing that part of the enemy's force was making its way to his rear, while the remainder were marching on Oporto and threatening an attack in front, Marshal Soult resolved to abandon the town and retreat upon the Spanish frontier. His march had been fixed for April 12, but was delayed twenty-four hours by the necessity of collecting the artillery and starting the baggage trains. This delay was fatal to him; the conspirators were busy, the marshal's orders were disobeyed or misunderstood, and their execution falsely reported to him. Things were therefore as bad as they could be when the English columns reached Villa Nova on the morning of the 12th. Soult had withdrawn his troops from the suburbs on the previous day, destroying the bridge which connected with the town, and carrying off every boat from the left bank. Thus secured against any attempt at crossing the Douro in front of Oporto,

the marshal's only fear was that the English fleet might land troops on the right bank at the river's mouth, and he had a careful watch kept on the banks below the town. But Sir Arthur Wellesley, hovering like an eagle over Oporto and the surrounding country from the heights of the Serra, became aware that above the town the French pickets were few and far between, and so confident in the protection afforded by the broad river that they neglected to patrol.

It may well happen in war that a battalion, a regiment, even a brigade, should be surprised; but history affords very few examples of an army being attacked unawares in broad daylight without being warned by its outposts. This, however, befell the French at Oporto in the following manner. Above the town the Douro flows in a sharp bend round the foot of the Serra. This part of the river the French might conceivably neglect when it was covered by the troops at Villa Nova and on the hill; but as soon as they abandoned these positions and concentrated on the right bank, they ought to have placed outposts above the town. However, whether through negligence or treason not only was this precaution omitted but a large number of boats were left unguarded outside the town close to an unfinished building called the New Seminary, the enclosure of which going down on each side to the bank might hold four battalions. Seeing so important a position deserted, Sir Arthur Wellesley conceived the bold plan of making this point the base of his attack, and, if he could procure a boat, of crossing the river under the eyes of a seasoned army and one of its most renowned generals.

A barber, eluding the French patrols, had come over from the city during the previous night in a small boat. This an English colonel seized,[1] and with a few men crossed the river and brought back three large barges, by means of which a battalion was conveyed to the Seminary. Taking possession of this, they sent over a great many boats, and in less than a hour and a half 6,000 English were in a strong position in

[1 Waters.]

the heart of the French army, and protected by guns placed on the Serra hill. The French outposts had seen nothing, and the army was at its ease in Oporto, when suddenly the town resounded with the noise of the drums and the call to arms. Then one might judge of the stuff of which French soldiers are made, and of their valour. Undiscouraged by the surprise, they rushed furiously to the Seminary, and had torn down the main gate and slain many of the English before overpowered by the cannonade from the left bank, and threatened in rear by an English force which had landed in the town. They were ordered by the marshal to quit the place and retire on Vallonga, a small town two leagues away in the direction of Amarante. The English did not venture to pursue that day, having lost heavily in the encounter. Lord Edward Paget, one of their best generals, was severely wounded; and on our side, General Foy. Otherwise our loss was not great.[1] Our veterans were so experienced, so hardened to war, that they recovered from a surprise more readily than any other troops. The English writers admit that order was restored in the French ranks before they reached Vallonga. The marshal might well blame himself for letting himself be surprised in this fashion; but it is only justice to say that when the disaster came he showed that his personal courage and steadiness did not fail him in the most difficult circumstances.

The marshal's one chance of safety on leaving Oporto was by the bridge of Amarante, which he believed to be held by Loison; but on the morning of the 13th he heard at Peñafiel that that general had abandoned it and withdrawn to Guimaraens. With unabated energy, seeing that his retreat by road was cut off, he resolved, silencing all timid and treacherous counsels, to retire by cross-country paths, difficult as the country was. He at once destroyed his artillery and baggage, placed his sick and his infantry ammunition in the teams, and under a pelting rain crossed the Sierra de Catalina by a narrow rocky path, and thus reached

[1 English loss: twenty killed, ninety-five wounded. French: five hundred killed and wounded.—Napier.]

Guimaraens. There he found the divisions of Loison and Lorge, who had come by road from Amarante.

Thus the French forces were concentrated at Guimaraens without having been attacked; from which Soult sagaciously inferred that the English had marched straight to cut off the retreat of the French at Braga, there being no longer any road practicable for their artillery. The malcontents, Loison among them, said that the only course left was to capitulate as at Cintra; but, with admirable decision, Soult ordered all the guns of Loison's and Lorge's divisions to be destroyed, and, having the Braga road on the left, took again to the mountain paths, thus gaining a day on the enemy, and reaching Salamonde in two marches. There, still resolved to avoid the beaten tracks, he crossed at right angles the road from Chaves to Braga, and pushed on through the mountains towards Montalegre. After marching some way the scouts brought word that the bridge over the Cavado at Ponte Novo was broken, and that 1,200 armed peasants with artillery were posted there to prevent its reconstruction.[1] If this obstacle could not be removed, retreat was impossible, and the troops worn out, short of food and boots, and with cartridges mostly spoilt by the wet, must surrender as soon as the English army came up with their rear.

Even in this extremity Soult's courage did not fail. Summoning Lieutenant-Colonel Dulong, who was justly reputed one of the bravest officers in his army, he bade him take a hundred picked grenadiers and try to surprise the enemy in the night. The only part of the bridge not destroyed was a course of masonry about six inches wide, and along this Dulong and twelve men crawled on their stomachs towards the enemy's outposts. One grenadier lost his balance and fell into the swollen river; his cries were drowned by the storm and the roar of the torrrent. Dulong with the remaining eleven reached the further bank, found the outposts asleep, and killed or dispersed them. The Portuguese

[1 There seems to be a confusion here between two bridges. This account applies to that of Ruivaens. Ponte Novo, as will be seen, was only partly broken.]

soldiers, encamped not far off, thinking that the French army had crossed the Cavado, fled likewise. The bridge was at once repaired, and the army saved. The brave Dulong was severely wounded the next day in an attack on an entrenchment thrown up by the Portuguese in a difficult defile. This was the last bit of fighting which the French had in their painful retreat. On the 17th they reached Montalegre, where they crossed the frontier into Spain, and concentrated at Orense, being again in communication with Ney's troops. Dulong was promoted to colonel. He died a lieutenant-general in 1828.

Thus ended the second invasion of Portugal. Marshal Soult had lost from all causes 6,000 men; and of the fifty-eight guns with which he started he brought back one only. Yet his reputation as a valiant soldier and capable general was unshaken, for people took into consideration both the steadiness which he had displayed and the great difficulties which he had to sustain, no less from the intrigues of conspirators than from the Emperor's omission to have him properly supported by Marshal Victor. Napoleon, having been used to receive punctual obedience from his lieutenants in former campaigns, expected to find the same in the Peninsula; but distance and the title of marshal rendered them more independent. Thus Victor, who should have marched on Lisbon by the Tagus valley, waited so long at Talavera, that the Spanish general Cuesta had time to collect a large army in the mountains of Guadalupe. Then Victor, rousing himself from his apathy, beat him in several battles, notably at Medellin on the Guadiana, and reached Merida on March 19, a month after the date fixed by the Emperor. But when reminded by King Joseph of Napoleon's order to enter Portugal and join Soult, Victor, being the junior, and not wishing to take a subordinate position, not only refused, but stayed the advance of Lapisse's division, which was already in possession of the bridge of Alcantara over the Tagus, and might have caused a diversion in favour of Soult before the English could reach Oporto. Finally, after a month's delay, learning that Soult had left Portugal, Victor

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retired, first blowing up the bridge of Alcantara, the finest monument of Trajan's genius.[1]

Soult, after providing himself with artillery from Corunna, held an interview with Ney, and proposed to unite their available forces and re-invade Portugal. But, as they could not agree, he brought his troops to recruit themselves at Zamora. Of the officers compromised in the plot at Oporto, Captain Argenton, adjutant of the 18th Dragoons, who was the soul of the conspiracy, was tried by court-martial and sentenced to death, but succeeded in escaping.[2] His colonel, M. Lafitte, was retired. General Loison and Colonel Donnadieu, who were accused, but without evidence, were not punished; but Loison's being allowed to remain with the Army of Portugal could not fail to be mischievous.

At this time Soult sent General Franceschi to Madrid to explain his views to Joseph. This excellent officer fell into an ambush laid by the guerrilla chief, called the Capuchin, and, being taken to Seville and Granada, was treated by the central junta as a criminal and thrown into prison. Afterwards he was removed to Cartagena, where he died of yellow fever. This was a great loss to the army, for Franceschi possessed all the qualities of a consummate general.

[1 The destruction of the bridge, though purposely brought about by Victor, seems actually to have been performed by Colonel Mayne, in command of a Portuguese force.]

[2 He escaped to England for a time only; returning to France, he was tried by court-martial and shot, December, 1809.]

CHAPTER XII

TOWARDS the end of 1809 the Emperor had placed all the army corps in Spain under the orders of his brother Joseph; but as he was no soldier, Napoleon only allowed him a nominal authority, and, by making Soult chief of the staff, gave him the real command of all the French troops in the south of Spain. While these were successful in capturing Seville and Cordova, and even investing Cadiz, the seat of the governing junta, General Suchet was administering Aragon and Valentia, most of the fortified towns in which he had taken by siege. Saint-Cyr and Augereau were active in Catalonia, where the warlike population was defending itself with vigour. The troops of the Young Guard were steadily keeping up an irregular warfare against the guerrillas of Navarre and the northern provinces. Generals Bonnet and Drouet occupied Biscay in the Asturias; Ney held the province of Salamanca, and Junot that of Valladolid. The French had evacuated Galicia, the country being too poor to maintain our troops. Such was, in brief, the position of our armies in Spain when Masséna entered Portugal after taking Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. His troops were composed as follows. The second corps of veterans from Austerlitz, who had been under Soult the previous year at Oporto, and whom General Reynier now commanded with Merle and Heudelet as generals of division; the sixth corps, also veterans, commanded by Ney, the divisions being under Marchand, Loison, and Mermet; the eighth corps, composed of moderately good troops, commanded in chief by Junot, with Solignac and Clausel, the future marshal, as generals of division; two divisions of cavalry under Montbrun, and a

powerful field artillery directed by General Eblé. General Lasouski commanded the engineers.

Deducting the garrisons left at Rodrigo, Almeida, and Salamanca, with the sick, the total number of combatants amounted to 50,000, with sixty guns and a great quantity of ammunition chests. This was far too large a train for a rough country like Portugal, where there were scarcely any high roads. Almost the only communications are narrow, rocky paths, often very steep, and everything is transported on mule-back. There are even districts where roads are absolutely unknown. Lastly, except in certain valleys, the soil is mostly arid, and offers insufficient resources for maintaining an army. Masséna had therefore every reason to go through the least difficult and most productive country. He did, however, just the contrary.

Having left the neighbourhood of Almeida on September 14, 1810, the army assembled next day at Celorico, where it saw the rich valley of the Mondego opening before it and might march on Coimbra by Sampayo and Ponte de Murcelha, over roads which, if not good, were at least tolerable. But under the influence of Major Pelet, his adviser, the marshal left the practicable country where the troops might have lived in comfort, and went off to the right into the mountains of Viseu, where the roads are the worst in Portugal. One need only look at the map to see how unreasonable it was to go by Viseu on the way from Celorico to Coimbra; a mistake all the greater from the fact that Viseu is separated from the Sierra d'Alcoba by high hills, which the army might have avoided by marching down the valley of the Mondego. The neighbourhood of Viseu produces no corn or vegetables, and the troops found nothing there but lemons and grapes—not very sustaining food.

Masséna's expedition very nearly came to an end at Viseu through lack of foresight on the marshal's part. He made his artillery park march on the extreme right of the column outside the masses of infantry, its only escort being an Irish battalion in the French service and a company of French grenadiers. Marching in single file more than a league in

length, the park was proceeding slowly and laboriously by difficult roads, when suddenly on its right flank appeared the English colonel Trant, with 4,000 or 5,000 Portuguese militia. If the enemy, profiting by his superior strength, had surrounded the convoy and made a resolute attack, all the artillery, ammunition, and provisions of the army would have been captured or destroyed. But Colonel Trant, as he himself said afterwards, could not suppose that a general of Masséna's experience could have left unsupported a convoy so essential to the safety of his army, and, supposing that a powerful escort must be close at hand, he dared to advance only with extreme caution. He confined himself, therefore, to attacking only the leading company of grenadiers, who answered by a heavy fire, killing some fifty men. The militia men recoiled in alarm, and Trant, doing what he should have done at first, overlapped a portion of the convoy. As he went forward he discovered the weakness of the escort, and sent a flag of truce to the commander, summoning him to surrender or he would attack him all along the line. The French officer adroitly consented to negotiate, in order to give the Irish time to come up from the rear of the convoy. They appeared at length, coming up at the double. As soon as the French officer saw them he broke off the conference, saying: 'I cannot treat any further; here is my general coming to my support with 8,000 men.' Each resumed his position, but Trant shortly left his and made off, thinking he had to do with the advanced guard of a strong column. Thus the artillery was saved, but the army soon learnt the danger in which it had been and the excitement was great. Ney, Junot, Reynier, and Montbrun went straight off to Viseu and addressed strong remonstrances to General Fririon, chief of the staff. He, however, asserted that, in spite of his demands, no information of the march of the columns had been given him, everything being settled by Masséna and Pelet. Horrified and indignant at this state of things, the commanders of the four corps called on Masséna with a view of making well-deserved remarks on it. Ney was the speaker, and from the aide-de-camp's room we could hear him

protesting; but Massena, foreseeing that the conversation would become animated, took the generals into a more distant apartment. I do not know what was decided, but it appears that the commander-in-chief promised to change his mode of action, for in a quarter of an hour we saw Masséna walking quietly in the garden, taking the arm of each of his lieutenants in turn. Unanimity seemed to be restored, but it was not for long.

As I have already said, childish reasons sometimes produce great and mischievous results. We had a striking example of it, which influenced the result of a campaign which was to have driven the English out of Portugal, but which by its failure increased their confidence in Wellington, while it seasoned the troops who did most to bring about our defeat in the following years. All the army knew that Masséna had brought Mme N—— to Portugal with him. This lady, having crossed the whole of Spain in a carriage, and having remained at Salamanca during the sieges of Rodrigo and Almeida, thought fit to follow Masséna on horseback as soon as he set out to march through a country impracticable for carriages, which produced a very bad effect. The marshal, who generally took his meals alone with her, had had his table laid that day under a clump of lemon-trees, the aide-de-camp's table being a hundred yards away in the same garden. Dinner was about to be served, when the commander-in-chief, wishing probably to cement the good relations which had just been established between himself and his lieutenants, remarked that as each of them had several leagues to go in order to reach his headquarters it would be best for them to dine with him before starting. All four accepted, and Masséna, in order to prevent any further remarks on the incident of the convoy, ordered that for once the aide-de-camp's table should be set by his.

So far all went well; but just before sitting down Masséna sent for Mme N——. On seeing the generals she drew back, but he said to Ney, 'My dear marshal, kindly take Madame.' Ney turned pale, and nearly burst out; but, restraining himself, he led the lady by the finger-tips,

to the table, and placed her, by Masséna's direction, on his right. During the whole meal, however, Ney said not a word to her, but talked to Montbrun, his neighbour on the left. Mme N——, who was too quick-witted not to see how false a position she was in, was seized with a nervous attack, and fell in a faint. Then Ney, Reynier, Montbrun, and Junot left the garden, not without a vigorous and audible expression of his views on the part of Ney. Reynier and Montbrun also said plainly what they thought; Junot spoke so bitterly, that I took the liberty of reminding him of the way in which he had met Mme N—— at Valladolid. He answered, laughing, 'Because an old hussar like me has his games sometimes, that is no reason for Masséna to imitate them. Besides, I must stand by my colleagues.' From that day forward the four generals were on the worst of terms with Masséna, who, on his side, bore them no goodwill.[1]

This quarrel among the chiefs could not fail to aggravate the causes making for the ill-success of the campaign. These arose mainly from our utter want of topographical knowledge of the districts in which we were fighting; arising from the omission of the Portuguese Government—either as a defensive measure, or through indolence—to have good maps made of the kingdom. The only one in existence was as bad as could be; so that we had, as it were, to feel our way along. There were officers in plenty who had campaigned in Portugal with Soult and Junot, but they had not been in the provinces where we were, and could be of no use as guides. On the staff we had some thirty Portuguese officers, among them two generals—the Marquis of Alorna and Count Pamplona, who had come to France in 1808 with the contingent furnished to Napoleon by the court of Lisbon. Though they had only obeyed the orders of the former Government, they were proscribed by the Commission of Regency, and thus had returned to seek possession of their

[1] Confirmation of these details will be found in M. Thiers's review of the causes which led to the French defeats in Portugal. [*Consulat et Empire*, book xl.]

confiscated goods in the train of our army. Masséna had hoped to get some useful information from these exiles; but except in the neighbourhood of Lisbon they knew nothing of their own country; while the English, who had been going all about it for two years knew its configuration perfectly, gaining thereby a great advantage over us.

Another cause told no less powerfully against us. Lord Wellington, being allowed a perfectly free hand by the Government, used it to compel all the people to leave their houses, destroy all provisions and mills, and retire with their cattle to Lisbon on the approach of the French, who thus were unable to obtain any information, and had to beat the country to a great distance in order to get provisions. The Spaniards had constantly refused to adopt this terrible means of resistance at the instance of the English; but the Portuguese were more docile. We thus crossed vast districts without seeing a single inhabitant; such an exodus had not been seen within human memory. The city of Viseu was totally deserted when we entered it, yet Masséna halted the army there for six days. This was a second mistake added to that which he had committed in leaving the valley of the Mondego. If on the morrow of his arrival at Viseu the French general had made a rapid march and attacked the Alcoba, on which Lord Wellington had then very few troops, the fault might have been repaired. But our delay of six days allowed the English to ford the Mondego above Ponte de Murcelha, and to unite their army on the ridges of the Alcoba at Busaco. No military writer of any country has been able to account for Masséna's inactivity of nearly a week at Viseu, but the marshal's staff can testify that Mme N——'s fatigue had much to do with delaying Masséna and keeping him at that place. The country was in arms, and it would have been impossible to leave her behind without exposing her to the danger of her being captured. Moreover, when he had made up his mind to start, Masséna made only very short marches, halting first at Tondella. The next day, September 26, after establishing his headquarters at Mortagoa,

on the right bank of the Criz, he lost precious time in securing the lady's quarters; and it was not till two in the afternoon that he set out with his staff for the outposts—five good leagues off, at the foot of the Alcoba.

This mountain ridge, about three leagues in length, abuts upon the Mondego to the east, and to the west is connected with detached hills of great steepness, impassable for an army. At the highest point is a convent, named Saco. The central part of the summit forms a sort of plateau, on which the English artillery was posted. It had freedom of action along the whole front of the position, and its range extended to beyond the Criz. A road passing round the ridge of Busaco afforded easy communication between the various portions of the enemy's army, while the slope facing towards the direction from which the French approached was, from its sharpness, well adapted for defence. The enemy's left rested on the hills above Barria; his centre and reserves on the convent; his right on the heights, a little in rear of San Antonio de Cantara. So formidable was the position that the English had some fear that the French commander-in-chief might not venture to attack.

When Masséna came up on the evening of the 26th he found that the army had in his absence been posted by Ney as follows: the 6th corps on the right, at the village of Moira; the centre facing the convent; Reynier's corps on the left, at San Antonio; and the 8th corps, under Junot, with the artillery, marching to take up a position in reserve in rear of the centre. The cavalry, under Montbrun, was at Bienfaita.

When an army has undergone a check it is but too common to find the generals throwing the blame on each other. This happened after Busaco, and thus it is necessary to mention here the opinion expressed before the battle by Masséna's lieutenants, who, having first urged him on to the commission of his greatest blunder, after the unfortunate event criticised his conduct. I have said that on the day but one before the battle the corps under Ney and Reynier were at the foot of the Alcoba, and in presence of the enemy.

While impatiently waiting for the commander-in-chief, these two generals exchanged in writing their respective views on the position of the Anglo-Portuguese army. There exists a letter,[1] dated on the morning of September 26, in which Marshal Ney says to General Reynier, 'If I were in command I would attack without a moment's hesitation.' Both expressed the same feeling in their correspondence with Masséna:—'The position is far less formidable than it looks, and if I had not been in so subordinate a position I would have carried it without awaiting your orders.' Relying on the assurance of Generals Reynier and Junot that nothing could be easier, Masséna made (although the contrary has since been affirmed) not the smallest attempt to reconnoitre, and, merely replying, 'Very well, I will be back at daybreak, and we will attack,' he turned and rode back to Mortagoa. Great was the astonishment at this abrupt departure, for, seeing Masséna join his troops, who were encamped within cannon-shot of the enemy, everyone supposed that he would use the remaining daylight to study the position which he had to carry, and would stay with the army. In going off thus, without seeing anything for himself, he no doubt made a great mistake; but I do not think that, after lulling to sleep his usual vigilance and urging him to attack, his lieutenants had any right to blame him as they afterwards did. On the contrary, they might well have found fault with themselves; for, after spending two days at the foot of the Alcoba, they advised a front attack, in spite of the steepness, and made no inquiries as to the possibility of turning it—a course, as you will presently see, offering no difficulty.

It was a misfortune for the army that General Sainte-Croix was not then with Masséna. His instinct for war would certainly have led him, taking advantage of the marshal's confidence in him, to induce him to abandon the idea of attacking directly so formidable a position before making sure that it could not be turned. But he was with his brigade some leagues to the rear, escorting a convoy.

Hardly had the commander-in-chief with his staff left

[1 It will be found in the Appendix to Napier, vol. iii.]

the army, than night came on—and Masséna had only one eye and was not a good horseman. Our road was strewn with large stones and pieces of rock, so we had, in the darkness, to go for more than two hours at a walk to accomplish the five leagues to Mortagoa. As we went along I meditated sadly on the probable results of the battle which we were going to fight on the morrow at such a disadvantage, and imparted my reflections in a low voice to my friend Ligniville and to General Fririon. We were all most anxious that Masséna should alter his dispositions; but no officer save Pelet was allowed to submit any suggestions to him directly. Yet the matter appeared urgent, and we decided to employ an artifice, which we had sometimes used with success, for bringing the truth indirectly to his notice. Agreeing upon our parts, we got near the marshal, feigning not to see him in the darkness; then we began to talk about the coming battle, and I said that I was sorry the commander-in-chief intended to assault the position in front without being certain that it could not be turned. Then General Fririon, playing his part as arranged, answered that Ney and Reynier had stated positively that there was no other way to get past, to which Ligniville and I replied that we could not believe that, for it was impossible that the people of Mortagoa should have lived for centuries devoid of direct communication with Boialva, and with no other way to the Oporto road than by Busaco, over the steepest part of the mountains. I added that when I had made the same remark to the aides-de-camp of Ney and Reynier, and asked which of them had reconnoitred the extreme left of the enemy's position, not one answered, from which I concluded that no one had visited that part. If Masséna saw badly his hearing was extremely keen, and, as we hoped, he had not missed one word of our talk. So much struck was he, that he came up to our group, and, joining in the conversation, admitted—cautious as he was—that he had assented too easily to the plan of assaulting in front. He said that he would counter-order this, and that if a way could be found of turning the position he would let the army rest next day, and on the

following night would concentrate it opposite the vulnerable point and attack unawares. No doubt there would be a day's delay, but the chances of success would be better and the probable loss lighter.

So determined did the marshal appear, that when we reached Mortagoa he bade Ligniville and me try to find some inhabitant who could show us a road to Boialva without passing Busaco. It was a difficult job, for the inhabitants had all fled at the approach of the French, and the extreme darkness was against our search. At length, however, we found in a monastery an old gardener who had stayed to take care of a sick monk. He brought us to this monk, who answered our questions freely; he had often been from Mortagoa and Boialva by a good road which branched off a short league from the place where we were. He was all the more surprised at our not knowing this, that part of our army in going from Viseu to Mortagoa had passed the turning. Guided by the old gardener, we went to verify the monk's statement, and found that an excellent road actually went in the direction of the mountains and appeared to pass round the enemy's left. Yet Marshal Ney had stayed two days at Mortagoa without exploring this road, a knowledge of which would have saved us many disasters.

Ligniville and I, delighted at our discovery, hastened to report it to the marshal; but we had been away more than an hour, and we found him with Major Pelet, surrounded by maps and plans. Pelet said that he had examined the mountains with a telescope by daylight and had seen in their configuration no sign of a pass to our right; moreover, he could not believe that Marshal Ney had not explored the neighbourhood while he was at Mortagoa, and as he had not found a pass it was clear that none existed, nor could we convince him of the contrary. In vain did we offer to go round and ascend the hill which the monk assured us was less steep than that of Busaco, or even to go as far as Boialva if they would give us three battalions of the headquarters guard. In vain did General Fririon beg the marshal to accept this offer: all was useless. Masséna was very tired,

he said that it was near midnight and that we must be off at four o'clock to reach the camp by daybreak, and with that he went to bed. Never did I pass a more melancholy night; and my comrades were as sad as I. At last the hour came for our start, and we reached the outposts with the first morning light of September 27, an ill-omened day which was to behold one of the most terrible reverses which the French army ever suffered.

CHAPTER XIII

On finding himself in front of the position which he had scarcely examined on the previous day Masséna appeared to hesitate, and, coming up to the place where I was chatting with General Fririon, he said sadly, 'Your suggestion of yesterday was worth considering.' Our hopes rekindled by these few words, we doubled our efforts to induce the commander-in-chief to turn the mountain by Boialva, and he was already coming over to our way of thinking, when Ney, Reynier, and Pelet came up and interrupted our talk with the remark that all was ready for the attack. Masséna made a few more remarks, but at length, overborne by his lieutenants, and fearing, no doubt, that he might be blamed for letting slip a victory which they declared to be certain, he gave orders towards seven o'clock to open fire.

The 2nd corps, under Reynier, attacked the enemy's right; Ney their left and centre. The French troops were drawn up on stony ground, sloping steeply down to a great ravine which separated us from the Alcoba, which was lofty, steep, and occupied by the enemy. From their commanding position they could see all our movements, while we saw only their outposts half-way up the hill between the convent of Busaco and the ravine, which at this point was so deep that the naked eye could hardly make out the movements of troops who were marching through it, and so narrow that the English bullets carried right across it. It might be regarded as an immense natural ditch, serving as the first line of defence to the natural fortifications formed by great rocks cut almost into a vertical wall. Besides this, our artillery, engaged in very bad roads and obliged to fire upwards, could render very little service; while the infantry had to contend

not only against a mass of obstacles and the roughest possible ascent, but also against the best marksmen in Europe. Up to this time the English were the only troops who were perfectly practised in the use of small arms, whence their firing was far more accurate than that of any other infantry.

Although you might expect that the rules of war would be alike among civilized nations, they do, as a fact, vary immensely even in identical circumstances. Thus, when the French have to defend a position they first garnish the front and flanks with skirmishers, and then crown the heights conspicuously with their main body and reserves, which has the serious inconvenience of letting the enemy know the vulnerable point of the line. The method employed in similar cases by the English seems to me far preferable, as was often demonstrated in the Peninsular War. After having, as we do, garnished their front with skirmishers, they post their principal forces in such a way as to keep them out of sight, holding them all the time sufficiently near to the key of the position to be able to attack the enemy at once if they come near to reaching it; and this attack, made unexpectedly upon assailants who have lost heavily and think the victory already theirs, succeeds almost invariably. We had a melancholy experience of this at Busaco. In spite of the numerous obstacles which favoured the defence, the brave men of the 2nd corps had just succeeded, after an hour of desperate work, performed with really heroic courage, in scaling the mountain, when, as they arrived panting at the summit of the ridge, they found themselves in front of a hitherto unperceived line of English infantry. After receiving them at fifteen paces with an admirably aimed and sustained fire which stretched more than five hundred men on the ground, this line dashed at the survivors with the bayonet. The unexpected attack, accompanied by a storm of grape on their flank, shook some of our battalions; but they quickly rallied, and, in spite of their heavy losses, our troops, astonished but not disconcerted, charged the English line, broke it at several points, and carried six guns. But Wellington had brought up strong reserves, while ours were at the foot of the mountain,

and the French, pressed on all sides, and compelled to give up the narrow ground which they occupied on the plateau, found themselves, after a long and brisk resistance, driven in a heap down the steep descent up which they had climbed. The English lines followed them halfway down, firing volleys to which our men could not reply—and murderous they were. All resistance being useless in so unfavourable a position, the officers ordered the men to take skirmishing order about the broken ground, and under a hail of bullets they reached the foot of the mountain. At this point we lost General Graindorge, two colonels, eighty officers, and seven or eight hundred men.

After such a check prudence would have forbidden to send any troops weakened by heavy losses a second time against a triumphant enemy with his position unaltered; yet General Reynier ordered Foy's and Sarrut's brigades to return to the charge; and Masséna, who witnessed this madness, allowed the second attack. It met with the same fate as the first. While this was taking place on our left, fortune was not more favourable to the 6th corps on our right. Although it had been arranged to attack simultaneously at all points, and Masséna had repeated the order about seven o'clock at the moment of engaging, it was half-past eight before Ney set his troops in motion. He asserted afterwards that he had been delayed by the difficulty of the position on that side, and it certainly was greater than on the left. Our people had just made one great mistake in sending the 2nd corps into action before the 6th was ready; Ney made one similar when he engaged Loison's, Marchand's, and Mermet's divisions without any cohesion. The troops attacked vigorously, and although entire files were swept away by cannon and musketry, the brigades of Ferey and Simon, with the 26th of the line, clambering up the steep rocks, flung themselves on the enemy's guns and captured three of them. The English, being reinforced, returned to the attack; General Simon, with his jaw smashed, fell, and was taken prisoner on one of the guns which he had just captured. Almost every field officer was killed or wounded,

and three volleys at close quarters completed the rout of the French masses, who returned in disorder to their starting-point. Thus ended the principal fight. The losses of the 2nd and 6th corps were immense. They amounted to more than 5,000 men, including 250 officers killed, wounded, or prisoners. General Graindorge, Colonels Monier, Amy, and Berliet killed; two others wounded; General Simon wounded and taken prisoner; Generals Merle, Mancune, and Foy severely wounded, besides two colonels and thirteen majors. The enemy in their sheltered position lost far less heavily, but they admitted 2,300 men disabled. We learnt afterwards that if we had attacked the day before the English would have withdrawn without fighting, because 2,500 of their best troops were then on the other side of the Mondego, and only arrived at Busaco the night before the battle. Such was the result of the six days lost by Masséna at Viseu, and his hurry to return on the 26th to Mortagoa instead of reconnoitring the position.

Our efforts having thus utterly failed in face of a hillside so steep that an unburdened man would have climbed it with difficulty, it surely behoved our leaders to put a stop to firing which had now become useless. Yet a brisk file-firing went on all along the lines at the foot of the position, which our soldiers, in their excitement, were to assault anew. These small encounters with an enemy hidden by lofty rocks were very costly to us, and there was a general feeling that they should cease, though no one gave the formal order. Just then the two armies witnessed a touching incident, forming a contrast to the scenes of slaughter all round. General Simon's valet, hearing that his master had been left badly wounded on the summit of the Alcoba, tried to make his way to him; but the enemy, not understanding his motive for approaching their lines, fired on him repeatedly, and the faithful servant was compelled to return to the French outposts. As he was lamenting his inability to aid his master, the *cantinière* of the 26th, belonging to the brigade, took the things from the valet's hands, loaded them on her donkey, and went forward, saying, 'We will see if the English will kill a woman'; listen-

ing to no objections, she went up the hill, and, passed coolly between the lines of skirmishers, who, savage as they were, ceased firing till she was out of range. Presently she saw the English colonel, and explained what she had brought. He received her kindly, and had her taken to General Simon, with whom she stayed several days, tending him to the best of her power, and only leaving him when the valet arrived. Then, getting on her donkey, she went through the enemy's army, by that time in retreat on Lisbon, and rejoined her regiment, without having received an insult of any kind, though she was young and very pretty. On the contrary, the English made a point of treating her with great respect.[1]

The two armies maintained their respective positions; it was a sad night for us; the future appeared gloomy enough. At daybreak on the 28th, the Alcoba echoed with mighty cheering and the strains of the English military bands. Wellington was reviewing his troops, who were saluting him with their hurrahs; while the French at the foot of the mountain were in gloomy silence. Masséna should have mounted his horse then, reviewed his army, harangued his soldiers, until they replied by their cheers to the defiant enthusiasm of the enemy. The Emperor and Marshal Lannes would certainly have acted thus. But Masséna held aloof, walking about all alone, and making no arrangements; while his lieutenants, especially Ney and Reynier, the very men who the day before had urged him to engage, saying that they would answer for victory, were loudly accusing him of imprudence in attacking a strong position like Busaco. When, finally, they joined the commander-in-chief, it was to propose that he should advertise our failure to the army, and all the world by abandoning Portugal and take the army back into Spain. Then old Masséna, recovering a little of the energy of Rivoli, Zurich, and Genoa, and many another memorable occasion, rejected their proposal as unworthy of the army and of himself.

[1 Napier also tells a story of a girl who passed unmolested through the armies; but in this case it was a Portuguese girl who actually crossed the battlefield, in the opposite direction, down, and not up, the mountain.]

The English have called the affair of Busaco a political battle, because the British Parliament, alarmed at the enormous cost of the war, appeared resolved to withdraw the troops from the Peninsula and content itself in future with supplying arms and ammunition to the guerrillas. As this plan tended to destroy Wellington's influence, he had resolved to prevent it from being carried out by replying with a victory to the fears of the English Parliament, and this determined him to await the French at Busaco. His plan succeeded, and Parliament voted further supplies for the war which was to be so disastrous to us.

While the marshal was discussing with his lieutenants, General Sainte-Croix came up. On seeing him everyone expressed regret that he had not been present the day before to act as the marshal's good genius. Masséna now understood the mistake he had made in not turning the enemy's left as we had advised him, and, on hearing the state of things from Masséna himself, Sainte-Croix advised him to revert to that plan. With the general's assent, he galloped off, accompanied by Ligniville and me, to Mortagoa, whither he sent for his brigade of dragoons. As we passed through the village we picked up the convent gardener, who, at sight of a piece of gold, consented to act as our guide, laughing when he was asked if there really existed a road to Boialva.

While Sainte-Croix's brigade, and a regiment of infantry, led the way in this new direction, the 8th corps and Montbrun's cavalry followed close behind, and the rest of the army prepared to do the same. Urged by Sainte-Croix, Masséna had at last spoken with authority, and imposed silence on his lieutenants when they persisted in denying the existence of a pass on the right.

In order to conceal from the English the movement of such of our troops as were at the foot of the Alcoba, they did not march until night, and then in dead silence. But information was soon given by the despairing cries of the French wounded, whom we were under the sad necessity of abandoning. A great number of horses, and all the beasts of burden, were employed to carry the men whom there was

hope of curing; but those who had lost their legs, or were otherwise severely wounded, were left lying on the dry heath, and as the poor fellows expected to have their throats cut by the peasants as soon as the armies were out of the way, their despair was terrible.

The French army had reason to fear that Wellington, seeing them execute a flank march so near him, would attack them vigorously. This might have led to the capture of Reynier's entire corps, which would be the last to leave its position, and would remain for some hours unsupported in presence of the enemy. But the English general had no time to think of turning the French rear-guard, for he had just learnt that he was being himself turned by the pass of which the French commander-in-chief had so long denied the existence. What actually happened was this. After we had marched all the night of the 28th, the gardener, going with the head of Sainte-Croix's column, brought us by a road practicable for artillery as far as Boialva, that is to say, to the extreme left flank of the English army, so that all the positions on the Alcoba had been outflanked without a blow, and Wellington, under pain of exposing his army to be taken in rear, had to abandon Busaco in haste, to regain Coimbra, and cross the Mondego there, with a view of retreating upon Lisbon, which he did with all speed. Our advanced guard only met with a small detachment of Hanoverian hussars posted at Boialva, a pretty village situated at the southern issue from the mountains. The fertility of the country gave hopes that the army might find abundant subsistence there. A shout of joy went up from our ranks, and the soldiers very soon forgot the fatigues and dangers of the previous days, perhaps also the unhappy comrades whom they had left dying before Busaco.

To complete the success of our movement, a good road joined Boialva with the village of Avelans on the road from Oporto to Coimbra. Sainte-Croix occupied this, and by a further piece of luck we discovered a second road from Boialva to Sardao, another village on the high road. At last, then, we had the proof of the existence of this pass, so obstinately

denied by Ney, Reynier, and Pelet. Masséna must have reproached himself for having omitted to reconnoitre the strong position before which he had lost several thousand men, and which his army had now turned without meeting the least resistance. But Wellington was still more to blame for not having guarded that point, and surveyed the road leading to it from Mortagoa. It was of no use for him to say afterwards that he did not believe the road had been practicable for artillery, and that he had besides ordered Trant to cover Boialva with 2,000 militia. Such an excuse is not permissible for experienced fighting men. It might perfectly well be answered that as to the state of the road the English commander should have reconnoitred it before the battle, and that, in the second place, it is not enough for the chief of an army to give orders, but that he should make sure that they have been executed. Boialva is only a few leagues from Busaco, and yet Wellington never ascertained that this pass, so important to the safety of his army, had been guarded according to his orders; so that if Masséna had been better inspired, and had, during the night of the 26th, sent an army corps to Boialva to attack the left flank of the enemy, while threatening him in front with the rest of his force, the English would certainly have suffered a sanguinary defeat. From all this we conclude that in the circumstances neither Wellington nor Masséna showed himself equal to his high reputation; and that they deserved the blame which their contemporaries addressed to them, and which history will confirm.

CHAPTER XIV

As soon as the army was clear of the defile of Boialva, Masséna marched on Coimbra by way of Milheada and Tornos. At the latter point there was a cavalry engagement, in which Sainte-Croix overthrew the English rear-guard, forcing them back on Coimbra. On October 1 the French entered that place. Deceived by the result of the battle of Busaco, and the assertion of English officers that the French army was retiring into Spain, the unhappy inhabitants of that city had abandoned themselves to a display of rejoicing. The festivities were not at an end, when suddenly came the news that the French had turned the mountains and were marching straight on Coimbra—that indeed they were not a day's journey distant. Indescribable panic prevailed; the population of 120,000 souls simultaneously with the news of the enemy's approach received orders to leave their home forthwith. Their departure was, by the admission of English officers, a most terrible sight; I refrain from relating the heart-breaking incidents.

Wellington's army, hampered by the mass of fugitives of every age, sex, and class, men and beasts of burden in inextricable confusion, retired in the greatest disorder toward Coimbra and Pombal, many perishing in the passage of the Mondego. This was good for Masséna. He should have sent Junot's corps, which, not having fought at Busaco, was fully available, in pursuit, and by a sudden attack he might have caused heavy loss to the English army, which, by the testimony of some of our men who had been captured at Busaco and had escaped, was in disorder beyond words. But, to our great surprise, and as if he wished to allow the enemy time to restore order to get away, the commander-in-chief

billeted his army in Coimbra and the adjacent villages, and waited three clear days. His excuse for this delay was the necessity of reorganising the 2nd and 6th corps which had suffered at Busaco, and of establishing hospitals at Coimbra; all which he might have done while the 8th corps was in pursuit of the enemy. But the real notion for the stay at Coimbra was, in the first place, the increasing want of confidence between Masséna and his lieutenants; and, further, his difficulty in deciding whether to leave a division in the place to cover his rear and protect the sick and wounded, or to take all his available forces from the battle which was expected to be fought outside Lisbon. Either course had its advantages and disadvantages; but he need not have taken three days to make up his mind. Finally he decided to leave a half-company to guard the convent of Santa Clara and protect the wounded who were assembled there from the first fury of an attacking force, with orders to capitulate as soon as an officer appeared.

But no definite instructions were given; and, under the impression that a division would remain, the colonels put all their infirm men, most of whom could perfectly well have marched, and desired nothing better, in the vast convent. More than three thousand were thus left behind, with two lieutenants and eighty men of the naval brigade as their sole guard.

I was surprised that Masséna, who was sure to require sailors when he reached the Tagus, should have sacrificed a number of these valuable men, who could not easily be replaced, when he might have left some infantry of inferior value. It was clear that in less than twenty-four hours the enemy's irregular troops would occupy the town; and indeed in the evening of the very day, October 3,[1] on which the French had left it, the Portuguese militia entered.

Our poor wounded had barricaded themselves in the convent, having no longer any doubt that Masséna had abandoned them, and were preparing to sell their lives dearly. The naval lieutenants behaved admirably. With the help of

[1] So in the original, but the dates here and a few lines below seem wrong.]

some infantry officers who were among the wounded, they collected all the men who still had muskets and could use them, and succeeded in holding the Portuguese in check all the night. On the morning of the 6th Brigadier Trant, the commander of the militia, arrived; and the naval officers capitulated to him in writing. Hardly, however, had the wounded French surrendered the few arms which they had than the militia fell on the poor wretches, many of whom could not stand, and butchered over a thousand. The rest, sent without mercy to Oporto, perished on the road; as soon as anyone fell out from fatigue the Portuguese killed him. Yet this militia was organized and led by English officers, commanded by an English general; and in not checking these atrocities Trant dishonoured his country and his uniform. In vain does Napier allege in his excuse that only ten French prisoners were sacrificed; the fact is, that nearly all were murdered either in the hospital at Coimbra or on the road. Even in England the name of Trant has become infamous.[1]

From Coimbra Masséna had written to the Emperor; but the difficulty was to transmit the despatch through the insurgent population. A Frenchman must have failed, and it was necessary to find someone who knew the country and could speak the language. A Portuguese officer named Mascareguas, who had entered the French service with General d'Alorna, offered to be the bearer. I saw him start disguised as a mountain-shepherd, with a little dog in his basket, in which costume he hoped to reach Almeida, where the French commandant would put him in the way of proceeding to Paris. But it was of no use for Mascareguas, who belonged to the first nobility of Portugal, to attempt to conceal his distinguished bearing and manner and his refined speech. The peasants were not taken in; he was arrested, brought to Lisbon, and condemned to death; and in spite of his appeal

[1 General Marbot's study of Napier does not appear to have extended to the Appendix, or he would have found a letter written to Trant by three French officers, a doctor, a colonel, and a naval commander, thanking him, in the name of the prisoners, for 'the trouble which he had taken to alleviate their condition.']

for the noble's privilege of decapitation, he was hanged as a spy in the public square.

The three further days wasted by the French at Coimbra allowed the English to get away, and it took us three days more to come up with their rear-guard at Pombal. Before our coming the body of the celebrated marquis of that name had lain in a magnificent tomb, erected in an immense mausoleum of wonderful architecture. This had been wrecked by the stragglers from the English army. They had broken the tomb and thrown the bones under the feet of their horses, which they had stabled in the vast building. A strange instance of the vanity of human things! There, lying in the filth, when Masséna and his staff visited the place, were the scanty remains of the great minister who put down the Jesuits!

From Pombal we went on to Leyria, and at 9 A.M. our advance-guard was on the banks of the Tagus, at Santarem. There we found immense stores of provisions; but this advantage was almost neutralised by autumnal rains such as are not seen out of the tropics except in the southern shores of the Peninsula, and which assailed us after unbroken fine weather. Both armies suffered much from this cause; but ours reached Alemquer, a market town at the foot of the hills of Cintra, which gird Lisbon at a few leagues' distance. We quite expected to have to fight a battle before entering Lisbon, but, as we knew that the town was open on the land-side, we had no doubt of success. Meantime, however, all the neighbourhood of Lisbon had been covered with fortifications. For a year and a half the English had been working at them; but neither Ney, who had just spent a year at Salamanca, nor Masséna, who for six months had been making ready to invade Portugal, had the least inkling of these gigantic works. Reynier and Junot were equally ignorant; most surprising of all—incredible, indeed, if the fact were not absolutely certain—the French Government itself did not know that the hills of Cintra had been fortified. It is inconceivable how the Emperor, who had agents in every country, could have omitted to send some to Lisbon. At that time thousands of American, German, Swedish, and English ships

were daily bringing into the Tagus stores for Wellington's army; and it would have been perfectly easy to have introduced some spies among the numerous sailors and clerks employed on these vessels. Knowledge of all kinds can be obtained by money; it was by this means that the Emperor kept himself informed of all that went on in England and among the great Powers of Europe. Nevertheless, he never gave Masséna any information as to the defences of Lisbon; and it was only on reaching Alemquer that the French general discovered that the hills were fortified and connected by lines of which the right touched the sea in rear of Torres Vedras, the centre was at Sobral, and the right rested on the Tagus, near Alhandra.

The day before our troops appeared at this point the English army had entered the lines, driving before it the population of the surrounding districts, to the number of 300,000 souls. Utter disorder prevailed; and those among the French officers who guessed what was taking place among the enemy regretted afresh and very keenly that Masséna had resolved a fortnight before to attack the position of Busaco in front. If that position had been turned, the enemy would have been taken in flank and have retired upon Lisbon, and our army, in full strength and ardour, would have attacked the lines on its arrival, and certainly have carried them. With the capture of the capital the English must have retreated precipitately, and the reverse would have been irreparable. But our heavy losses at Busaco had chilled the ardour of Masséna's lieutenants, and bred ill-will between them and him; so that now all were trying to paralyse his operations, and representing every little hillock to be a new height of Busaco the capture of which would cost copious bloodshed. In spite, however, of this want of loyalty, Masséna despatched the 8th corps towards the enemy's centre, and Clausel's division carried the village of Sobral—a very important point for us. Just when a simultaneous attack along the whole line was expected, General Sainte-Croix, who had urged this course, was killed by a cannon-shot in front of Villa-Franca. That excellent officer was with General Montbrun making a reconnoissance toward Alhandra,

and as they passed along the Tagus, on which several Portuguese sloops were cruising, and firing out our outposts, poor Sainte-Croix was cut in two by a chain-shot. It was a grievous loss for the army, for Masséna, and above all for me, who loved him like a brother.

After the death of the only man capable of giving him good advice the commander-in-chief fell back into his state of perpetual indecision, wavering under the clamour of his lieutenants, who, in their present faint-heartedness, represented all the hills of Cintra as bristling with cannon ready to make mince-meat of us. In order to know what he was really to think about it, Masséna, who since the advice which Ligniville and I had offered at the battle of Busaco, had evinced some kindness towards us, directed us to examine the front of the enemy's lines. They were undoubtedly of imposing strength, but very far from what people were pleased to say. The English entrenchments formed an immense arc round Lisbon, at least twenty French leagues in length. Every officer of the least experience knows well that a position of this extent cannot present the same difficulties everywhere and must have its weak spots. We became aware of several such by seeing officers, and even cavalry pickets, ride up quite easily; and we also became convinced that our engineer officers who had mapped the hills had figured an armed redoubt wherever they saw a little earth recently disturbed. The English, to lead us into a mistake, had on every small elevation traced works of which most had not yet got beyond the stage of planning. But even if they had been completed it seemed to us that the ground was sufficiently irregular to conceal the movements of a portion of our army, and that by employing one corps to make a feint on the front while the other two pushed real attacks on the weakest points of this long line, they would find the English troops too widely scattered, or at any rate with their reserves at a cousiderable distance from the points attacked.

The age of Louis XIV. was a period when great use was made of lines, and history shows that the greater part of those which were attacked were carried for want of the power

of mutual support among the defenders. We thought that at some point of their vast extent it would be easy to pierce the English lines, and an opening once made, the enemy's troops, who would be in some cases a day's journey from the opening, would recognise that they had not time to come up, except in very inferior strength, and would retire, not to Lisbon, whence vessels cannot get out in all winds, but to Cascaes, where their military fleet and transports were assembled. Their retreat would have been very difficult, and might perhaps have become a rout. In any case their embarkation in presence of our army would have been a second edition of Sir John Moore's at Corunna. We have since seen English officers, among others General Hill, admit that if the French had attacked within the first ten days after their arrival they would have easily penetrated together with the confused multitude of peasants in the midst of whom the English armies could never have disentangled themselves nor made any regular dispositions for defence.

When my comrade and I reported in this sense to Masséna, the old soldier's eyes sparkled with martial ardour, and he at once issued marching orders to prepare for the attack which he reckoned on making the next day. However, on receiving the orders, his four lieutenants hastened to his quarters and a stormy discussion took place. Junot, who had commanded in Lisbon, and knew it well, declared that it seemed impossible to him to maintain so large a town, and expressed himself strongly for the attack. General Montbrun shared his opinion; but Ney and Reynier hotly opposed it, adding that the loss at Busaco, together with that of the wounded who had been abandoned at Coimbra, and the numerous sick who had been for the moment disabled by the rains, had so largely diminished the number of combatants, that it was not possible to attack a strong position, and further, that their men were demoralised—an inaccurate statement, for the troops were showing great ardour in demanding to march upon Lisbon. Losing his patience, Masséna repeated *vivâ voce* the orders he had already given in writing, and Ney declared in so many words that he would

not carry them out. The commander-in-chief was minded then to remove Ney from the command of the 6th corps, as some months later he was obliged to do. But he considered that Ney was beloved by his men, whom he had commanded for seven years; that his removal would involve that of Reynier, which would complete the discord in the army at a moment when unanimity was so eminently needed. The energetic advice of Sainte-Croix was no longer at hand to sustain him, and Masséna quailed before the disobedience of his two chief lieutenants. They could not indeed decide him to leave Portugal, but they extorted from him a promise to move away from the enemy's lines, and to retire ten leagues back behind Santarem and Rio Mayor and there await fresh orders from the Emperor. I saw with regret this little retreat, which seemed to me to augur one more general and definitive, nor, as you will soon see, did my presentiment deceive me. I turned my back therefore with sorrow on the hills of Cintra, fully persuaded that if we had profited by the confusion into which the fugitives had thrown the English camp we might have forced the unfinished lines. But what was then easy was no longer so a fortnight later. Compelled to feed the vast population, which at his bidding had streamed in upon Lisbon, Wellington used the arms of 40,000 stout peasants by making them work at the completion of the fortifications with which he proposed to cover Lisbon, and thus the place became of immense strength.

CHAPTER XV

DURING our stay at Sobral I saw another artifice employed by the English, and one of sufficient importance to be worth noting. It is often said that thoroughbred horses are of no use in war, because their price is so high and they require so much care that it would be almost impossible to provide a squadron, much more a regiment, with them. Nor indeed do the English use them on campaign; but they have a habit of sending single officers, mounted on fast thoroughbreds, to watch the movements of a hostile army. These officers get within the enemy's cantonments, cross his line of march, keep for days on the flanks of his columns, always just out of range, till they can form a clear idea of his number and the direction of his march. After our entry into Portugal, we frequently saw observers of this kind flitting round us. It was vain to give chase to them, even with the best-mounted horsemen. The moment the English officer saw any such approach he would set spurs to his steed, and nimbly clearing ditches, hedges, even brooks, he would make off at such speed that our men soon lost sight of him, and perhaps saw him soon after a league further on, note-book in hand, at the top of some hillock, continuing his observations. This practice, which I never saw anyone employ like the English, and which I tried to imitate during the Russian campaign, might perhaps have saved Napoleon at Waterloo by affording him a warning of the arrival of the Prussians. Anyhow, these English 'runners,' who were the despair of the French general from the moment we left Spain, increased in boldness and cunning as soon as we were in front of Sobral. One could see them come out of the lines and race with the speed

of stags through the vines and over the rocks to inspect the positions occupied by our troops.

One day, however, when there had been a little skirmish of outposts, in which we had remained in possession of the ground, a light-infantryman, who had for some time had his eye on the best mounted and boldest of the enemy's 'runners,' and knew his ways, shammed dead, quite sure that as soon as his company was out of the way the Englishman would come back to look at the little battlefield. He did come, and was unpleasantly surprised to see the supposed dead man jump up, kill his horse with a musket-shot, and then charge him with the bayonet, summoning him to surrender, which he had no choice but to do. The prisoner, on being presented to Masséna by his captor, turned out to be a member of the highest English nobility, a Percy, descended from one of the most illustrious Norman chiefs, to whom William the Conqueror gave the Duchy of Northumberland, which his offspring still hold. Mr. Percy was honourably received by the French commander and taken to Sobral. Being curious to mount the clock tower, in order to observe how our army was posted, he was allowed to do so; and from this lofty point, telescope in hand, he witnessed an amusing sight, at which, in spite of his own bad luck, he could not help laughing: the capture of another English officer. This gentleman, having returned from India after twenty years' absence, and hearing in London that his brother was serving in Portugal, had sailed for Lisbon, and hurried up on foot to the front to greet his brother, whose regiment was on duty. It was a lovely day, and the new comer diverted himself by admiring the beautiful country and studying the fortifications and the troops which occupied them. So intent was he on this, that he walked past the outposts without knowing it, and was between the two armies. Just then he caught sight of some fine figs, and not having tasted European fruit for a long time, took a fancy to climb the tree. While he was quietly regaling himself, the soldiers of a neighbouring French picket, surprised to see a red coat among the branches, came up, and seeing what it was, captured the English officer, amid the laughter

of all those who witnessed the incident from afar. This Englishman, however, better advised than Mr. Percy, begged his captors to keep him on the outskirts of the French army, hoping, that if he saw nothing of its internal arrangements, he might be exchanged. His foresight proved successful; for Masséna, having no fear of his being able to give any information as to the disposition of our troops, sent him back on parole, begging Lord Wellington to exchange against him Captain Letermillier, who had been taken at Coimbra, and afterwards became one of our best colonels. Mr. Percy, who had laughed much at his comrade, on learning that he had been exchanged, requested the same favour; but this was refused, as he had seen too much, and might report it. The unlucky young man followed the French army as a prisoner, and shared its sufferings for six months. On our return to Spain he was transferred to France, where he passed several years.

Unable to obtain any backing from his lieutenants in his proposed attack on the lines, and being short of provisions, Masséna was compelled, on November 14, to retire ten leagues back from the hills and establish his army in a corn-growing district, where positions could be found suitable for defence. He selected the country between the Rio Mayor, the Tagus, and the Zezere, establishing the 2nd corps at Santarem, the 8th at Torres Novas (where also he fixed his headquarters), the 6th at Thomar, the artillery park at Tancos, while the cavalry were at Ourem with their outposts pushed as far as Leiria. Inferring from this movement that the French were in full retreat for Spain, the English followed, but cautiously and at a distance, fearing a trick to draw them out of their lines. When they found that we were halted behind the Rio Mayor they gave us some trouble, but were vigorously met; and judging that want of provisions would soon drive us to leave this district, well adapted for the defensive, they contented themselves with watching us. Lord Wellington's headquarters were fixed at Cartaxo, opposite Santarem, and from November 1810 till March 1811 the armies faced each other, separated only by the Rio Mayor. The English, having their food supplies brought by the Tagus from Lisbon, lived

in comfort; but the provisioning of our army, having no stores, and being in a contracted space, was a serious problem. Our troops, however, worked with admirable patience and industry, each contributing, like bees in a hive, his share to the common welfare. Workshops were started in every battalion; and each regiment, organising a system of raids on a large scale, sent out detachments, armed and well led, who returned driving thousands of donkeys laden with provisions of all kinds, and immense herds of sheep, pigs, and goats, the booty being proportionately divided on its arrival. As the nearer districts became exhausted, the raids had to be pushed further afield, even to the gates of Abrantes and Coimbra; and the attacks of the infuriated peasantry, though always beaten off, caused some loss. Besides these, the foraging parties had a new form of enemy to contend with, resembling in its organisation the robber bands of the middle ages.

A French sergeant, wearied of the misery in which the army was living, resolved to decamp and live in comfort. To this end he persuaded about a hundred of the worst characters in the army, and going with them to the rear, took up his quarters in a vast convent, deserted by the monks, but still full of furniture and provisions. He increased his store largely by carrying off everything in the neighbourhood that suited him; well-furnished spits and stewpans were always at the fire, and each man helped himself as he would; and the leader received the expressive if contemptuous name of 'Marshal Stockpot.' The scoundrel had also carried off numbers of women; and being joined before long by the scum of the three armies, attracted by the prospect of unrestrained debauchery, he formed a band of some three hundred English, French, and Portuguese deserters, who lived as a happy family in one unbroken orgy. This brigandage had been going on for some months, when one day, a foraging detachment having gone off in pursuit of a flock as far as the convent which sheltered the so-called 'Marshal Stockpot,' our soldiers were much surprised to see him coming to meet them at the head of his bandits, with orders to respect his grounds and

restore the flock which they had just taken there. On the refusal of our officers to comply with this demand, he ordered his men to fire on the detachment. The greater part of the French deserters did not venture to fire on their compatriots and former comrades, but the English and Portuguese obeyed, and our people had several men killed or wounded. Not being in sufficient numbers to resist, they were compelled to retreat, accompanied by all the French deserters, who came back with them to offer their submission. Masséna pardoned them on condition that they should march at the head of the three battalions who were told off to attack the convent. That den having been carried after a brief resistance, Masséna had 'Marshal Stockpot' shot, as well as the few French who had remained with him. A good many English and Portuguese shared their fate, the rest were sent off to Wellington, who did prompt justice on them.

Early in November, Masséna had sent General Foy to report his position to the Emperor: three battalions being required to escort him in safety to the Spanish frontier. Meanwhile, not knowing when the expected reinforcements might arrive, he feared that the English army might cross the Rio Mayor, and make an unexpected attack on our divisions at a time when every regiment had detached at least a third of its men to search for provisions. If the enemy had arrived in the middle of our cantonments while so many soldiers were away, a catastrophe would certainly have followed; and the dispersed troops would have been liable to be beaten in detail before they could reassemble. Luckily for us, however, Lord Wellington based all his plans on lapse of time, and did not venture upon any enterprise.

Meanwhile the Emperor, whose only news of Masséna's army had so far been obtained from the London newspapers, having at length received the despatches brought by General Foy, ordered the Count of Erlon, commanding the 9th corps, cantoned near Salamanca, to march upon Portugal, and to send Gardanne's brigade forward at once with instructions to find the French army, and take it the ammunition and the draught horses of which it presumably stood in need. With

all the Emperor's perspicacity it was impossible for him at Paris to judge of the numerous difficulties which would hamper Gardanne in carrying out his orders. Napoleon could never believe that the flight of Portuguese occupants at the approach of a French corps had been so universal that it was impossible to come across an inhabitant from whom one could receive the slightest information. This, however, was what befel Gardanne. A former page of Louis XVI., whom the Emperor had made governor to his pages, he was lacking in initiative, and only did well under the direction of an able general. Now he completely lost his bearings. Not knowing where to find Masséna's army, he wandered in all directions, and when he at length reached Cardigos, a day's march, as his maps showed, from the Zezere, he did not realise that in war a flying column in search of a friendly force should always steer itself by rivers, forests, large towns, and mountain chains, for if the troops whom he has to reach are anywhere near, they will certainly have pickets at these important points. It is hard to understand why Gardanne forgot this rule of the craft, but he actually lost a good many men by a precipitate retreat without having seen the enemy. If he had but pushed on three leagues to the Zezere he would have seen our outposts, as it was he returned to Spain taking back reinforcements, ammunition, and horses.

Masséna began to fear lest provisions might run short on the right bank of the Tagus, and resolved to tap a new country by throwing a portion of his army across the river, into the fertile province of the Alemtejo. To this end he ordered a division to cross the Zezere and occupy Punhete, a small town at the point where that river flows into the Tagus. This seemed a good point to establish a bridge, but materials were lacking. Everything was, however, supplied by the zeal and activity of General Eblé, well supported by his surbordinate artillery officers. Forges and saw-mills were built; tools, planks, beams, anchors and ropes manufactured, numerous boats were constructed, and the work progressing as it were by magic, we conceived the hope of

being able to cast a solid bridge over the Tagus. Lord Wellington prepared to oppose the crossing of the river, bringing troops up from Lisbon to form a camp on the left bank opposite Punhete: whence we augured that before we could establish ourselves on the further side of the great river we should have to sustain a hot engagement. All this while the French army was occupying the positions which it had taken up in November. Several English divisions were encamped on the right bank of the Rio Mayor, Lord Wellington's headquarters being at Cartaxo. There died the celebrated General La Romana.

The weather was fearful; the roads had become torrents, and the difficulty of seeking provisions, and especially forage, was much increased. Yet our French gaiety did not desert us. In every camp societies were got up for theatricals, and the houses deserted by the inhabitants supplied us with plenty of costumes in the wardrobes which the Portuguese ladies had left behind. We found also plenty of French books; our quarters were comfortable, and we continued to pass the winter pretty well. Our reflections were, however, often sad, both as to the situation of the army, and our own position. For three months we had had no news from our families, from France, even from Spain. Would the Emperor send us reinforcements sufficient to take Lisbon, or should we be compelled to retreat before the English? Our minds were full of these thoughts, when on December 27 it was suddenly reported that General Drouet, Count of Erlon, had just joined the army with the 9th corps, 25,000 to 30,000 strong. But our satisfaction was much reduced on finding that the Count of Erlon's army had never contained more than 12,000 men: half of whom he had left on the Spanish frontier under General Claparède, bringing with him only Cornoux's division, 6,000 strong, a reinforcement quite inadequate to meet the English and take Lisbon. Instead of going at once to the commander-in-chief at Torres Novas, the Count of Erlon stopped ten leagues short of it at Thomar, Ney's headquarters. This was a great blow to Masséna, and he sent me to the commander of the 9th corps to ask for an explanation of a

course as much opposed to politeness as to military regulations. When he gave me this commission he had no doubt that the Count of Erlon had been placed by the Emperor under his orders, but there he was wrong. The instructions given by the chief of the staff to the commander of the 9th corps were only to enter Portugal, find Masséna's army, hand over to him some hundreds of draught horses with ammunition, and then to return to Spain with his troops. It is hard to understand how, after the reports which the Emperor had received from Foy and Casabianca as to the bad plight of the army, he could have limited himself to sending such weak support.

I found that the Count of Erlon had been lodging with Ney twenty-four hours. The marshal, who was anxious to get away from Portugal, had detained his guest in order that the influence of the commander-in-chief might not induce him to put their 6,000 men at his disposal, and thus enable him to resist the proposal to retreat. The Count was therefore making ready to depart next day, without visiting Masséna; to whom he begged me to make his excuses on the plea that important business called him back to the frontier.

An aide-de-camp's duties are pretty difficult, since in performing them he often has to convey instructions to his superiors which may wound their self-esteem. Sometimes in the interests of the service he has on his own responsibility to act as interpreter of his general's wishes by giving in his name orders which he has not dictated. This is a serious—even a dangerous matter; but the tact of the aide-de-camp must enable him to judge of the circumstances. My position was as delicate as it well could be, for Masséna, not having foreseen that the commander of the 9th corps might wish to leave Portugal, had put nothing in writing on the subject. Still, if he did take away his troops the operations of the army would be paralysed, and the commander-in-chief would blame the caution which had made me shrink from speaking in his name. I took, therefore, a bold resolve; and although I had never met the Count of Erlon (Ney being present the while, and strongly opposing my arguments), I took

the liberty of saying that at least he ought to give Marshal Masséna time to consider the orders which he had brought from the chief of the staff, as well as time to reply to them. Finally, when the count had repeated that he could not wait, I struck my great stroke by saying: 'Since your Excellency forces me to fulfil my errand to the last word, I have to inform you that Marshal Masséna, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in Portugal, has directed me to convey to you both in his own name and that of the Emperor, a formal order not to move your troops, but to report yourself to him to-day at Torres Novas.' The count made no reply but ordered his horses. While they were being got ready, I wrote to Masséna telling him what I had been obliged to do in his name; and I learnt later on that he approved. (A passage relating to my mission to the Count of Erlon may be found at p. 286 of the eighth volume of General Koch's 'Memoirs of Masséna;' but the scene I have mentioned is not fully reported.) The Count of Erlon was a gentle and reasonable man. As soon as he had left Ney's camp he admitted that it would not have been proper for him to leave the Army of Portugal without calling on the commander-in-chief; and all the way from Thomar to Torres Novas he treated me with much kindness, in spite of the vigour with which I had thought myself bound to appeal to him. No doubt his interview with Masséna finally convinced him, for he agreed to remain in Portugal and his troops were sent into quarters at Leyria. Masséna's gratitude for the firmness and readiness which I had shown was increased a few days later when he learnt that Lord Wellington had formed a plan of attacking our camp, and had been checked by the arrival of the Count of Erlon; while, if the reinforcement had been withdrawn, the English would have marched on us, and profited by our extended line to crush us with superior numbers.

CHAPTER XVI

We began the year 1811 at Torres Novas, and its early days were marked by an event which saddened all the staff, the death of our comrade d'Aguesseau. This excellent young man, the heir of an illustrious name and possessor of a large fortune, had been drawn by the desire of acquiring fame into the career of arms which might have been supposed to be closed to him by his delicate health. He had borne the fatigues of the Austrian campaign pretty well, but those which we had to undergo in Portugal were beyond his powers, and he died in the prime of life. We erected a monument to him in the principal church of Torres Novas.

Colonel Casabianca, whom Masséna had sent with despatches to the Emperor, had returned with the Count of Erlon, bringing information that Marshal Soult, who was in command of a powerful army in Andalusia, had received orders to enter Portugal and join the commander-in-chief.

Disquieted by our preparations, and wishing to know in what condition our works were, Wellington employed a strong measure which he had often found successful. One very dark night an Englishman, dressed in officer's uniform, got into a small boat on the left bank a little above Punhete, landed in silence, passed through the French outposts, and at daybreak walked boldly towards our workshops examining everything at his ease as if he had belonged to the staff of our army. Our artillerymen and engineers coming to their work in the morning perceived the stranger, arrested him, and brought him to General Eblé, to whom this scoundrel impudently declared that he was an English officer, and that, in disgust at a piece of favouritism which had been committed to his injury, he had deserted in order to take service in our

Irish legion. On being taken before the commander-in-chief he not only repeated his story, but offered to give detailed information as to the positions of the English troops, and point out the places where we might with most advantage cross the Tagus. You will hardly believe that Masséna and Pelet, much as they despised the fellow, put faith in his tale, and wishing to profit by his advice, spent whole days over the maps with him, taking notes of what he said. We of the staff were not so much taken in, for nothing could persuade us that an English officer would have deserted, and we declared plainly that in our opinion the pretended captain was nothing but a clever spy sent by Wellington; but nothing that we could say shook Masséna's and Pelet's belief. Yet our conjectures were well founded, as it was soon proved, when General Junot came to headquarters, and his aide-de-camp recognised the so-called English officer as having acted the deserter once before in 1808, when the French army was occupying Lisbon. Junot also remembered him perfectly, although he was now wearing an infantry uniform instead of the hussar uniform which he wore at Lisbon, and advised Masséna to shoot him. But the stranger protested that he had never served in the cavalry, and to prove his identity showed a captain's commission with which Wellington had probably supplied him in order to enable him to pass for what he professed to be. Masséna therefore did not like to order his arrest, but his suspicions were aroused, and he ordered the commanding gendarme to have him closely watched. The spy got an inkling of this, and the following night got down very cleverly from a third-floor window and reached the neighbourhood of Tancos, whence he probably swam across the Tagus, for some of his clothes were found on the bank. Thus it was clearly shown that he was an agent of the English general, and that Masséna had been tricked. His wrath fell upon Pelet, and rose to fury when he discovered that the sham deserter, who had been so imprudently admitted into his study, had walked off with a small note-book in which the effective strength of each regiment was entered. Later on we learnt that this clever scamp was no officer in

the English army, but a captain of Dover smugglers, who, to abundant resource and audacity, added the power of speaking several languages and of wearing every kind of disguise.

Meanwhile time passed and brought no change in our position, for although the Emperor had thrice bidden him to reinforce Masséna, Soult, imitating the attitude of Marshal Victor towards himself in 1809, had stopped on the way about the end of January to besiege Badajos. We could hear the firing distinctly, and Masséna regretted much that his colleague should be wasting precious time on a siege instead of marching towards him just when we were about to be compelled by scarcity of provisions to abandon Portugal. Even after the capture of Badajos, the Emperor blamed Marshal Soult's disobedience and said, 'He captured me a town, and lost me a kingdom.'

On February 5 Foy rejoined the army, bringing up a reinforcement of 2,000 men. He came from Paris, where he had held long conferences with the Emperor, and announced afresh that Soult was soon coming to join us. But as the whole of February went by and he did not appear, the Count of Erlon, whom by an inexplicable blunder the Emperor had not placed under Masséna's orders, declared that his troops could not live any longer at Leyria, and that he was going to march back to Spain. Marshal Ney and General Reynier seized this opportunity to set forth again the misery of their cause in a country which was completely ruined, and the commander-in-chief was obliged at last, after several months of obstinate resistance, to consent to a retreat towards the frontier, hoping to find there the means of supporting his army without entirely abandoning Portugal, and to invade again as soon as the reinforcements arrived. Our retreat began on March 6th. General Eblé had with much regret employed the previous days in destroying the barges which he had taken so much trouble to build, but in the hope that part of his preparations might one day be of use to a French army he had all the iron-work secretly buried in the presence of twelve artillery officers, and drew up a report which must

be in the Ministry of War, showing the place where this precious depository is to be found. Its position will probably remain unknown for many centuries. The preparations were kept so secret and executed during the night of March 5 in such good order, that the English, whose outposts were only separated from ours by the little stream of the Rio Mayor, did not discover our movement till the morning of the next day, by which time General Reynier's troops were five leagues away. Lord Wellington, in his uncertainty whether the object of our movement was to cross the Tagus at Punhete or really to retire towards Spain, lost twelve hours in hesitation; and by the time he resolved to follow, which he did without energy and at some distance, the French army had gained a march upon him. Meanwhile, General Junot, having gone prancing imprudently in front of the English hussars, was struck on the nose by a bullet; but the wound did not hinder him from retaining the command of the 8th corps during the rest of the campaign.[1] The army moved in several columns on Pombal, Marshal Ney with the 6th corps forming the rear-guard, and valiantly defending his ground foot by foot. As for Masséna, roused at length from his torpor, he gained between the 5th and 9th of March three days on the enemy, and completely organised his retreat—one of the most difficult operations of war. Contrary to his usual custom, also, he was so cheerful as to surprise us all.

The French army, continuing its retreat with regularity and in compact order, was leaving Pombal when the rear-guard was briskly attacked by the advanced guard of the enemy. Marshal Ney drove them back; and in order to bar their passage completely and save our baggage wagons, he set fire to the town. The English historians[2] have cried out against this as a cruel action—as if a general's first con-

[1] According to Napier, the date of Junot's wound was some weeks earlier, and it did disable him, though, of course, he may have retained the nominal command.]

[2] Not including Napier, apparently. In fact, in his account of the fighting at Pombal he does not mention that the place was burnt, while he excuses the burning of Redinha and other places on the ground that it served to cover Masséna's movements.]

sideration should not be the safety of his army. Pombal and its neighbourhood forming a long and narrow defile through which the enemy must pass, the best way to stop them was to burn the town. It was an extreme measure, but one which in similar cases the most civilised nations have been compelled to take, and the English themselves have often acted in the same manner.

On March 12 there was a smart engagement before Redinha. Marshal Ney having found a defensible position, decided to halt there, and Lord Wellington, taking this as a challenge, sent forward a strong body. After a hot action Ney repulsed the enemy, and continued his retreat briskly, but with the loss of two or three hundred men. The enemy lost more than a thousand,[1] our artillery having played on his masses for some time, while he had only two light guns in position. This engagement was of as little use to the English as to us. Why should Wellington, knowing that Ney had orders to retire, and that the French were in declared retreat, be in such a hurry to attack merely in order to make Ney resume his march a little sooner than he would otherwise have done? I was present at this affair, and deplored the false pride of the two generals which cost so many brave men their lives with no result.

The main French army took up a position between Condeixa and Cardaxo. The critical moment of our retreat had arrived. Masséna, not wishing to leave Portugal, had resolved to cross the Mondego at Coimbra, and await orders and reinforcements from the Emperor in the fertile district between that town and Oporto; but Trant had cut the bridge of Coimbra, and the Mondego was so much swollen as to be unfordable. The only course open was, therefore, to reach Puente de Murcelha, and there cross the rapid torrent of the Alva. Accordingly, on the 13th the headquarters started in that direction. We ought to have reached Miranda de Corvo the same day; but for some unknown reason the marshal established himself at Fuente-Cuberta, where, believing himself covered by the divisions which he had ordered Ney to

[1 Twelve officers and two hundred men (Napier).]

post at Cardaxo and Condeixa, he had with him only a guard of thirty grenadiers and twenty-five dragoons. But Ney, under plea of an attack by superior forces, had abandoned these points; giving notice to Masséna so late that he did not get the letter till some hours after the execution of the movement, and might have been captured with all his staff. In fact, believing that he was under the safeguard of several French divisions, and finding the place agreeable and the weather fine, he had ordered his dinner to be served in the open air. We were sitting quietly at table under the trees near the entrance of the village, when suddenly there appeared a detachment of fifty English hussars, less than a hundred yards away. The grenadiers surrounded Masséna, while the aides-de-camp and the dragoons mounted and rode towards the enemy. As they fled at once, we supposed they were some stragglers, seeking to rejoin their army; but we soon saw an entire regiment, and perceived that the neighbouring hillsides were covered with English troops who had almost completely surrounded Fuente-Cuberta. The imminent danger in which the headquarters were placed was due to a mistake on the part of Ney. Thinking that the commander-in-chief had had his letter, he ordered all his divisions to evacuate Cardaxo and Condeixa, thus uncovering Fuente-Cuberta. The enemy had come up in silence, and you may judge of our astonishment; but luckily night was at hand, and a thick fog rising. The English, never dreaming that the French commander would be thus separated from his army, took our group for a rear-guard, which they did not venture to attack; but it is certain that if the hussars had made a resolute charge, they would have carried off Masséna and all who were with him. Naturally when the English heard of Masséna's narrow escape they made the most of it; and Napier avers that he only escaped their hussars by taking the feathers out of his hat. Unfortunately for this story, marshals did not wear plumes.

That evening the headquarters left Fuente-Cuberta very quietly, though several regiments of the enemy were close by; one posted on some rising ground which our road

crossed. To get it out of the way, the marshal employed an artifice of which the enemy, to whom French was familiar, often made use against us. Knowing that my brother spoke English well, he gave him instructions; and Adolphe, advancing towards the foot of the hill and keeping in shadow, called out to the commanding officer that Lord Wellington ordered him to bear to the right, and take up a position which he indicated, in another direction than that which we were following. The colonel, unable to see my brother's uniform, took him for an English aide-de-camp, and obeyed. When he was out of the way, we passed on quickly, glad to escape a new danger, and joined the 6th corps before daylight.

During this long and toilsome march, Masséna's attention was much occupied with the danger to which Mme N—— was exposed. Several times her horse fell over fragments of rock invisible in the darkness, but although cruelly bruised, the brave woman picked herself up. After several of these falls, however, she could neither remount her horse nor walk on foot and had to be carried by grenadiers. What would have happened to her if we had been attacked, I do not know. The marshal, imploring us all the time not to abandon her, said repeatedly: 'What a mistake I made in bringing a woman to the war!' However, we got out of the critical situation into which Ney had brought us.

On the following day, March 14, after beating back a smart attack upon his rear-guard, Masséna posted the mass of his troops in a strong position in front of Miranda de Corvo, in order to give the artillery and baggage wagons time to pass the defile beyond the town. Seeing the French army halted, Lord Wellington brought up a strong force, and everything promised a serious engagement when Masséna summoned his lieutenants to receive his instructions. All but Ney came at once, and as he did not arrive the commander-in-chief ordered Major Pelet and me to go and ask him to come quickly. This errand, which seemed an easy one to discharge, nearly cost me my life.

The French army was drawn up on ground descending

gently in the form of an amphitheatre towards a large brook, lying between two broad hills, over the summits of which passed country roads, leading to Miranda. At the moment when Pelet and I galloped off to execute the marshal's order, the English skirmishers appeared in the distance, coming up to attack the two hills. In order to be more certain of finding Marshal Ney, my companion and I separated. Pelet took the road on the left, I that on the right, passing through a wide clearing, in which were our outposts. Hearing that Marshal Ney had passed by, less than a quarter of an hour before, I felt bound to hasten to meet him, and just as I hoped to come up with him, I heard several shots, and bullets whistled past my ears. I was no great distance from the enemy's skirmishers, posted in the woods surrounding the clearing. Although I knew that Marshal Ney had a strong escort, I was uneasy on his account, fearing that the English might have cut him off, until I saw him on the other side of the brook. Pelet was with him, and both were going in the direction of Masséna. So, being sure that the orders had been conveyed, I was about to return, when a young English light infantry officer trotted up on his pony, crying, 'Stop, Mr. Frenchman; I should like to have a little fight with you!' I saw no need to reply to this bluster, and was making my way towards our outposts, 500 yards in arrear, while the Englishman followed me, heaping insults on me. At first I took no notice, but presently he called out, 'I can see by your uniform that you are on the staff of a marshal, and I will put in the London papers that the sight of me was enough to frighten away one of Masséna's or Ney's cowardly aides-de-camp!' I admit that it was a serious error on my part, but I could no longer endure this impudent challenge coolly; so, drawing my sword, I dashed furiously at my adversary. But just as I was about to meet him, I heard a rustling in the wood, and out came two English hussars, galloping to cut off my retreat. I was caught in a trap, and understood that only a most energetic defence could save me from the disgrace of being taken prisoner, through my own fault, in sight of

the whole French army, which was witness to this unequal combat. So I flew upon the English officer; we met; he gave me a slash across the face, I ran my sword into his throat. His blood spurted over me, and the wretch fell from his horse to the ground, which he bit in his rage. Meanwhile, the two hussars were hitting me all over, chiefly on the head. In a few seconds my shako, my wallet, and my pelisse were in strips, though I was not myself wounded by any of their blows. At length, however, the elder of the two hussars, a grizzled old soldier, let me have more than an inch of his point in my right side. I replied with a vigorous backhander; my blade struck his teeth and passed between his jaws, as he was in the act of shouting, slitting his mouth to the ears. He made off promptly, to my lively satisfaction, for he was by far the braver and more energetic of the two. When the younger man found himself left alone with me, he hesitated for a moment, because as our horses' heads were touching, he saw that to turn his back to me was to expose himself to be hit. However, on seeing several soldiers coming to my aid, he made up his mind, but he did not escape the dreaded wound, for in my anger I pursued him for some paces and gave him a thrust in the shoulder, which quickened his speed. During this fight, which lasted less time than it has taken to tell it, our scouts had come up quickly to set me free, and on the other side the English soldiers had marched towards the place where their officer had fallen. The two groups were firing at each other, and I was very near getting in the way of the bullets from both sides. But my brother and Ligniville, who had seen me engaged with the English officer and his two men, had hastened up to me, and I was badly in want of their help, for I was losing so much blood from the wound in my side that I was growing faint, and I could not have stayed on my horse if they had not held me up. As soon as I rejoined the staff, Masséna said, taking my hand, 'Well done; rather too well done! A field officer has no business to expose himself in fighting at the outposts.' He was quite right, but when I told him the motives which had led me on,

he blamed me less, and the more fiery Ney, remembering his own hussar days, cried, 'Upon my word, in Marbot's place I should have done the same!' All the generals and my comrades came to express their concern, while Dr. Brisset was attending to me. The wound in my cheek was not important; in a month's time it had healed over, and you can scarcely see the mark of it along my left whisker. But the thrust in my right side was dangerous, especially in the middle of a long retreat, in which I was compelled to travel on horseback, without being able to get the rest which a wounded man needs. Such, my children, was the result of my fight, or, if you like, my prank at Miranda de Corvo. You have still got the shako which I wore, and the numerous notches with which the English sabres have adorned it prove that the two hussars did not let me off. I brought away my wallet also, the sling of which was cut in three places, but it has been mislaid.

As I said, at the moment when I was sent in search of Ney, the French army was drawn up in its position, commanding Miranda de Corvo, expecting an attack. However, Wellington, deterred no doubt by his losses on the previous days, checked the march of his troops, and Masséna, seeing this, determined under cover of the approaching night to pass through the town and long defile of Miranda. I was in a painful position, having been on the march for two days and a night, and now severely wounded and weakened by loss of blood, being obliged to pass another night on horseback. The roads were fearfully crowded with baggage and artillery wagons and numerous columns of troops, against which I was always running in the pitchy darkness. To crown our disasters, we came in for a heavy storm. I was soon wet through, and sat shivering on my horse, for I knew that if I got off to warm myself, I should not have strength to mount again. Meanwhile my wound caused me acute pain; so you may judge how I suffered during this cruel night.

On the morning of the 15th the army reached the banks of the Ceira, opposite Foz de Arunce, a small town on a hill commanding the river and the level ground on the left bank.

Crossing the bridge, I settled myself for a moment in a house, hoping to get a little rest; but the terrible scene which was passing before my eyes prevented this. Reynier's and Junot's corps were already in Foz de Arunce, Ney's still on the other side of the river; but the commander-in-chief, knowing that the enemy was close upon us, and not wishing his rear-guard to fight with the Ceira in its rear, ordered Ney to bring all his troops across, cut the bridge, and strongly guard the neighbouring ford, so that the men might rest undisturbed. Ney, however, supposing that the enemy, tired by the labours of the two last days, were still at a distance, and deeming it pusillanimous to abandon the left bank wholly, left on that side two divisions of infantry, Lamotte's brigade of cavalry, and several guns, and did not cut the bridge; a fresh piece of disobedience which went near to cost us dear. As it happened, while Masséna was gone off to Ponte Murcelha to superintend the restoration of another bridge which was to secure the passage of the river Alva on the next day, and Ney, full of confidence, had just given General Lamotte leave to cross the Ceira by the ford, in order to forage on the right bank, Lord Wellington suddenly appeared, and instantly attacked the divisions left so imprudently on the hither bank. Ney himself, at the head of the 39th, bravely repulsed with the bayonet a charge of English dragoons, but their colonel, Lamour, having been killed by a bullet, the 39th, losing their heads, flung themselves back on the 59th and carried them away. At the same moment, one of our batteries inadvertently sent a shot in their direction, and our men, thinking they were surrounded, fled in a panic to the bridge. Lamotte, who could see all this from the other bank, tried to bring his cavalry across in support; but instead of coming by the difficult ford where he had gone over, he took the shortest way, and so blocked the bridge with his brigade just as the fugitives came up from the opposite direction. No one could pass, and a good many men, seeing the bridge thus blocked, made for the ford and threw themselves in. Most got over, but several missed their footing and were drowned. Meanwhile Ney, exhausting every

effort to repair his mistake, succeeded at length in collecting a battalion of the 27th, and making his way to the divisions of Mermet and Ferey, who were holding their ground manfully, put himself at their head, and attacking on his side drove the English back to their camp. Astounded at this vigorous attack, and hearing the shouts of our men who were struggling to cross the Ceira, they imagined that the whole French army was upon them. Panic-stricken in their turn they flung down their arms, left their guns, and took to headlong flight. We on the right bank then witnessed a sight unusual in war: two sides flying each from the other in complete disorder! Finally the panic on both sides was checked, and English and French returned to the abandoned ground to pick up their muskets; but both sides were so much ashamed of themselves that though they were quite close to each other not a shot was fired nor any challenges exchanged, and they retired to their positions in silence. Wellington did not even venture to oppose Ney's retreat; and he recrossed the river and cut the bridge. In this queer engagement the English had some 200 men disabled, and killed 50 of ours; but we lost 100 by drowning, and unhappily the 39th lost its eagle. The best divers failed to recover it at the time, but it was found by Portuguese peasants in the following summer, when part of the river bed was dry.

Ney visited on General Lamotte his wrath for the check he had received, and withdrew from him the command of his brigade. Lamotte was, however, a good and brave officer, and in after times the Emperor did him justice. Next, eager to have his revenge, he waited on the banks of the Ceira throughout part of the 16th in the hope of attacking Wellington when his turn came to cross, and Masséna had to send four or five aides-de-camp before he could induce him to follow the retreat. On the 17th, we crossed the Alva at Ponte Murcelha, and marched for five days, reaching Celorico unmolested.

The valley between the Mondego and the Estrella is exceedingly fertile, and we lived in comfort. Thus, on finding ourselves again at Celorico, whence Masséna had had the un-

lucky idea of turning aside from this fertile region on our outward march, and taking to the mountain district of Busaco, the army blamed him afresh, feeling that his mistake had cost many thousands of lives, and brought the campaign to failure. The marshal now—unable to make up his mind to re-enter Spain—resolved to hold his ground at any cost in Portugal. His plan was to regain the Tagus by way of Guarda and Alfayates, and having rebuilt the bridge of Alcantara, to join the French troops under Soult before Badajos, with them to enter the Alemtejo, and at once march upon Lisbon. He hoped thus to force Wellington to march back at once for the defence of the capital, which, being unfortified on the left bank of the Tagus, would have very little means of resistance. To relieve the march, the marshal sent all sick and wounded into Spain, but I declined to go with them, preferring to remain with my brother and my comrades. Masséna having communicated his plan to his lieutenants at Celorico, Marshal Ney, who was burning with desire to recover his independence, opposed the idea of a new campaign, declaring that he was going to take his troops back to Spain because they could no longer get any bread in Portugal. This was true, but the army had been accustomed to live without bread for the last six months, each soldier receiving several pounds of meat and plenty of wine. This fresh disobedience on Ney's part roused Masséna's wrath, and he replied by a general order, removing Marshal Ney from the command of the 6th corps. This act of vigour, just and necessary as it was, had been too long delayed; he should have done it at the first sign of insubordination. Ney at first refused to go away, saying that as the Emperor had given him the command of the 6th corps he should not resign it but by his direction; but on the order being repeated, he returned to Spain, and thence went to Paris. The command of the 6th corps fell by right of seniority to General Loison. Ney's dismissal produced an impression upon the army which was all the stronger that the principal cause of it was known, and that, insisting on a return to Spain, he had expressed the general wish of the troops.

On the 24th, the army began to move back upon the Tagus, and occupied Guarda. Of all towns in the Peninsula, this is in the highest situation. Several men died from the cold, and my wound in the side became very painful. Here Masséna received several despatches from Berthier, nearly all two months old; which shows what a mistake Napoleon had made in thinking that from Paris he could direct the movements of an army in Portugal. These despatches reached the commander-in-chief in a manner which up to then had been unknown in the French army. Prince Berthier had entrusted them to his aide-de-camp, M. de Canouville, but that young officer, who was one of the beaux of the army, seeing the difficulty of reaching Masséna's army, was satisfied with depositing them at Ciudad Rodrigo, and returned to Paris. Now Paris was the very place from which, on account of a notorious freak on his part, he was desired to keep away. The story is as follows: it carries us back to the time when General Bonaparte was commanding the Army of Italy, and several ladies of his family joined him at Milan. One of them married one of his most attached generals, and, as in the fashion of the time, she used, when riding, to wear a hussar pelisse over her habit, Bonaparte gave her one, handsomely furred and with diamond buttons. Some years afterwards, this lady, having lost her first husband, married a foreign prince. In the spring of 1811, the Emperor, when reviewing the guard in the Place du Carrousel, noticed among Berthier's staff Canouville, wearing the pelisse which he had formerly given to his kinswoman, the identity of which was established by the fur and the diamonds. Napoleon recognised them, and displayed much annoyance. The lady, it was said, was severely reprimanded, and one hour later the imprudent captain received an order to carry despatches to Masséna, who was enjoined in them to keep that officer with him for an unstated time. Canouville had his suspicions, and, as I have just related, took advantage of the chance which prevented him from entering Portugal. But hardly had he got back to Paris, when he was packed off again to the Peninsula, where he arrived very much ashamed at his

discomfiture. The conversation of this modern Lauzun amused us, as he gave us the latest news of what had been taking place in the Paris drawing-rooms during our absence, and we laughed much at the contrast between his elegant costume and the dilapidations of our uniforms after a year's campaigning. Canouville, who at first was much astonished by his rapid transition from Parisian boudoirs to a bivouac among the rocks of Portugal, soon resigned himself to the change. He was a man of good wit, and of courage, and in the following year fell bravely in the battle of the Moskowa.

CHAPTER XVII

THE despatches which Canouville had left at Ciudad Rodrigo reached Masséna, as I have said, at Guarda, just when he was making arrangements to hold the upper Tagus; and instead of going on at once with his movement, he wasted some days in replying to these letters of two months ago. This delay was injurious to us, for the enemy took advantage of it to bring up his troops, and attack us at Guarda. We repulsed[1] him here, and so in the other partial combats which Masséna sustained while awaiting the officers whom he had sent to Alcantara. On learning from their report that it would be impossible to feed the army in a country devoid of resources, Masséna's will had at last to yield before accumulated obstacles, aggravated by the opposition of the generals and the destitution of the troops; and it was decided to return to Spain. Still, however, the commander-in-chief delayed, and Wellington profited by a false move on the part of Reynier to attack him at Sabugal. The fight was undecisive; but we lost two or three hundred more men in a glorious but useless engagement.

Next day, April 1, the army crossed the frontier and encamped on Spanish territory. It still included more than 45,000 effectives, and had sent more than 10,000 sick and wounded to Rodrigo and Salamanca. We had entered Portugal with 60,000 combatants, besides the division of the 9th corps which had joined us. During this long campaign, therefore, we had lost about 10,000 men killed, dead of illness, and prisoners.

[1] So one has to render *repousser*; but, seeing that as a matter of fact, the French were forced to evacuate Guarda, the words evidently do not correspond accurately in meaning.]

The army took post round Almeida, Ciudad Rodrigo, and Zamora. Masséna was thus in a most awkward position, for the two fortresses and the surrounding country were under the authority of Bessières, to whom the Emperor had entrusted the command of a new army, called the 'Northern,' entirely composed of troops belonging to the Young Guard. Hence arose a conflict of authority between the two marshals, Bessières wishing to keep all the supplies for his troops, while Masséna reasonably maintained that his army, which had endured so many hardships in Portugal, had a right to at least an equal share in the distribution of provisions. The Emperor, usually so farsighted, had not given any orders to meet the case of Masséna's army being forced to evacuate Spain. Great perplexity, therefore, prevailed on the frontier, especially as to the defence of Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida. These two fortresses, though in different countries, are so near that it was unnecessary to hold both, and the Emperor had ordered the withdrawal of the garrison of Almeida and the destruction of the ramparts, already much shattered by the explosion of the previous year. But just when the governor, General Brénier, was taking steps for the destruction of the place, he had received a counter-order from the War Minister, so that Masséna, who meantime arrived from Portugal, could not decide anything. However, as the troops could not subsist in the sterile neighbourhood of Almeida, he was obliged to take them away, and abandon the place to its own resources. These consisted of a weak garrison victualled for twenty-five days. If positive orders had been received, a week during which the army was present would have sufficed to destroy the fortifications; but as soon as it was gone, the English hastened to invest the place, and next month an expedition had to be undertaken for its relief which cost many lives, and did not attain its object.

The order placing the Count of Erlon and his force under Masséna's command came at length, three months too late. After cantoning his army between Rodrigo, Zamora, and Salamanca, the marshal, on April 9, fixed his headquarters

in the last-named town. While we were there an event occurred not very creditable to the English army. Colonel Waters, a member of Wellington's staff, had been taken prisoner by our troops; and, as he gave his parole, Masséna allowed him to retain his sword and his horse, and to lodge each night in a private house. He thus travelled at liberty, in company with our columns, till one day when they were halted in the wood of Matilla, he seized the moment when all were reposing, and putting his excellent horse into a gallop, disappeared. Three days later he rejoined Wellington, who seemed to find the trick highly amusing.[1] When Masséna complained that the Portuguese militia had been massacring French prisoners, and recently a colonel, the same Wellington replied, 'That he had to employ all his resources to repel a war of invasion, and could not answer for the excesses into which the peasants were led.'

Rest and good care at Salamanca soon cured me; but my satisfaction at this was alloyed by a vexatious incident which caused me much trouble. My good friend Ligniville left us in consequence of a serious difference with Masséna. The marshal had entrusted him the laborious duties of chief equerry, which he performed, I may say, quite voluntarily, and out of good-nature. Fond as he was of horses, he had much difficulty in feeding them in Spain and Portugal, but he made the best of it. It had been ascertained that in order to convey all the utensils and baggage of the headquarters, thirty mules were required, and Ligniville, before entering on the campaign, had proposed to obtain them; but Masséna, not wishing to bear the cost himself, had ordered the commissary-general to get them for him. He had these pack animals with him throughout. Now the Spaniards have a good habit of shaving their mules' backs, so that the hair may not work into lumps under the pack, and make them sore. The operation can only be done by experts, and is pretty costly. Masséna, therefore, proposed to Ligniville to make the Mayor of Salamanca pay the cost out of the

[1 Napier (book xii. ch. 5) expressly states that Waters had refused his parole.]

local funds; but Ligniville refused to be a party to what he thought an exaction, and a scene ensued. Finally my friend told the marshal that as he showed so little gratitude for his condescension in acting as equerry he would not only vacate the post, but offer his resignation, and rejoin the 18th Dragoons, to which he belonged. In vain did Masséna try every means to make him stay; Ligniville, a calm but very determined man, was inflexible, and fixed the day for his departure. Major Pelet being away on service, I was doing the duty of senior aide-de-camp, and in that capacity I assembled all the staff officers, and proposed to them that we should show our esteem for our good comrade by riding with him a league from the town. My suggestion was accepted, and in order that Prosper Masséna should not seem to be finding fault with his father, we were careful to tell him off to remain in the ante-room while we escorted Ligniville. Our farewell was cordial, for we all liked him. Though our action was perfectly honourable, Masséna was angry at it, and accused me of instigating it; and from that time his grudge against me revived, though my behaviour during the campaign had restored his confidence and interest in me.

Meanwhile the garrison of Almeida, invested by the English, and almost out of provisions, was on the point of surrendering, and the Emperor, in order to deprive the English of this triumph, had ordered Masséna to march his whole forces to the place and blow up the ramparts. But this operation had, as I have said, now become a very delicate one, since a considerable force was blockading Almeida and we should have to fight a battle. There was another not less serious difficulty. Masséna's army, distributed through the province of Salamanca, was not exactly living in the arms of plenty. Still every cantonment could supply the small body quartered in it, while if we were to march on the English, we must concentrate our troops and provide supplies which we had no sufficient means of storing or transporting.

As governor of the province, Marshal Bessières could dispose of all its resources, but he reserved them for the regiments of the guard. He had plenty of cavalry and a

formidable artillery, while Masséna, though his infantry was still respectable, was short of horses. He therefore asked Bessières to lend him some, and all the letters which he received from him abounded in the most encouraging protestations. As, however, they remained without result, and Almeida was known to be at the last gasp, Masséna no longer contented himself with writing to his colleague, whose headquarters were at Valladolid, but resolved to send an aide-de-camp, who could explain the gravity of the position, and press him to send support. The commander-in-chief selected me to discharge this duty. Having been severely wounded on March 14, I was, five weeks later, not exactly in condition to ride post-haste over roads covered with guerrillas. In any other circumstances I should have remarked as much to the marshal, but as he was cross with me, and as I had, through excessive zeal, asked leave to resume my duties (not expecting to have such a severe job in the course of the next few days) I did not care to throw myself on Masséna's pity, so I started in spite of the remonstrances of my comrades and my brother, who offered to take my place. In order to perform the duty I had to gallop the whole way on post horses; the wound in my side reopened and caused me much pain, still I reached Valladolid. Marshal Bessières, to prove outright that he cherished no grudge against me in regard to the quarrel between Marshal Lannes and himself on the battlefield of Essling, in which I was so innocently involved, received me very kindly. Complying with Masséna's reiterated request, he promised to send several regiments and three batteries of field artillery as well as abundant provisions. In such haste was I to report this good news to Masséna that I started back after a few hours' rest. At one moment I thought I was going to be attacked, but at the sight of the pennons on the lances of our escort, the *guerrilleros*, who had a particular dread of that arm, took to their heels, and I got back to the marshal without any trouble. Satisfied as he was with the result of my mission, he did not say a single good-natured word about the zeal which I had shown. It must be admitted that the many annoyances which

he had all around him did a good deal to embitter his naturally vindictive temper. He had to undergo another and crowning one. Our war in the Peninsula being directed from Paris, many strange anomalies resulted. For instance, just as the chief of the staff was directing Masséna to bring all his troops together and hasten to the relief of Almeida, he was ordering the Count of Erlon, whose corps formed part of Masséna's army, to repair at once to Andalusia and join Soult. Ordered thus in two contrary directions, and knowing that his troops would be better off in fertile Andalusia than in sterile Portugal, Erlon was making ready to start for Seville. But as his departure would have deprived Masséna of two fine infantry divisions, and made it impossible for him to relieve Almeida, according to the Emperor's instructions, he declined to allow it. The other insisted, and the wretched squabbles which we had already witnessed in the past winter with regard to the corps were revived. At length, under pressure from Masséna, the Count of Erlon agreed to remain till the blockade of Almeida was raised. That a commander-in-chief should have thus to entreat his subordinate was quite unreasonable, and could only injure military discipline.

Meanwhile Bessières' promised reinforcements, not having arrived by the 21st, Masséna, reckoning only on his own resources to make his way to Almeida, concentrated his army on the 26th at Ciudad Rodrigo. But in order to feed the assembled forces, it was necessary to draw upon the supplies of Rodrigo, and thus compromise the future fate of that important place. We were only three leagues from the English who were surrounding Almeida. We could not communicate with the place, and we did not know their strength. But we knew that Wellington had gone beyond Badajos with a strong detachment, and Masséna, trusting that he would be unable to be back for eight or ten days, wished to take advantage of his absence and accomplish the re-victualling of Almeida. Wellington, however, hearing of the movement of the French, returned promptly on his tracks, and was in front of us on May 1st. This was a great misfortune, for it was probable that General Spencer, who

was in temporary command of the English army, would not have ventured to take the responsibility of engaging such an adversary as Masséna, and Almeida might have been revictualled without trouble.

Great was the joy of our soldiers, who, though they had lived some days on half rations of bread and less of meat, were yet eager to fight, when, on the morning of the 2nd, they saw a weak column of Marshal Bessières' troops approaching, and took it for an advance-guard. But the reinforcement so pompously announced, and so long awaited, was confined to 1,500 cavalry, 6 guns, and 30 good teams. Bessières was bringing neither ammunition nor provisions. It was a regular hoax. Masséna was horrified, but very soon grew angry at seeing that Bessières was himself in command of this feeble succour. Indeed, the presence of that marshal was calculated to annoy him. The Army of Portugal was, it is true, in a province subject to the jurisdiction of Bessières, but it was independent of him, and solely under Masséna's orders, nor was there any reason, because Bessières was lending a few soldiers, that he should come in person to control in some measure his colleague's actions. Masséna understood this, and said to us, 'He would have done much better to have sent me a few more thousand men with ammunition and provisions, and to have remained at the centre of his province than to come examining and criticising what I am going to do.' Bessières was therefore very coldly received, but this did not hinder him from following Masséna during the short campaign and giving him his advice. The army started on the afternoon of May 2, and hostilities began the next day. A new series of mistakes commenced, arising from the ill-will of certain generals towards Masséna, and the want of understanding which prevailed among the rest.

We fell in with the Anglo-Portuguese army on the frontier, posted in front of Almeida, and blockading the place. The troops were occupying a broad plateau between the stream of the Turones and the one which flows in the deep gorge called Dos Casas. Lord Wellington's left was near the ruined Fort Concepcion, his centre towards the village of Alameda, and

his right posted at Fuentes d'Oñoro was prolonged towards the marsh of Nave de Avel, whence flows the stream which some call Dos Casas and others d'Oñoro; this brook covered his front. The French came up in three columns by the Ciudad Rodrigo road; the 6th and 9th corps, under Loison, formed the right wing, facing Fuentes; the 8th corps, under Junot, and Montbrun's cavalry, were in the centre; General Reynier, with the 2nd corps, watched Alameda and Fort Concepcion on the right. Several picked battalions, the lancers of the guard, and some batteries formed the reserve; it was commanded by General Lepic, famous for his brilliant conduct at Eylau.

Our troops were hardly in their respective positions when General Loison, without awaiting Masséna's orders for a concerted movement, charged the village of Oñoro, occupied by the Highlanders and some picked battalions. Their attack was so brisk that the enemy, although entrenched in solid stone houses, were compelled to abandon the position. But they retired into an old chapel on the top of the huge rocks which command Oñoro, and it was impossible to dislodge them. Masséna, therefore, gave orders for the moment only to occupy the village and to garnish all the houses with troops. But the order was badly executed, for Ferey's division, to whom the duty fell, carried away by the ardour of a first success, formed in a mass outside Oñoro, thus exposing itself to an artillery and musketry fire from the English at the chapel. Finally, to complete our disasters, our troops were thrown into disorder by a deplorable occurrence, which should have been foreseen. In Ferey's division there was a battalion of the Hanoverian legion in the French service. Their uniform was red, like the English, but they had the usual grey overcoat of the French soldier, and accordingly their commander, who had had several men killed by our people at Busaco, asked leave for his men to wear their greatcoats instead of rolling them up, as the order was. But General Loison replied that he must follow the order given to the whole corps. The result was a cruel blunder. The 66th regiment, having been sent to support

the Hanoverians, who were in the fighting line, mistook them in the smoke for an English battalion, and fired into them, while our artillery, equally misled by the red coats, played on them with grape. I must do the brave Hanoverians the justice to say that, placed as they were between two fires, they endured them for a long time without recoiling a step, but after losing 100 men killed and many wounded, the battalion was compelled to retire, passing along one side of the village. Another regiment, which was entering the village at that moment, seeing the red coats on their flank, supposed that the position had been turned by an English column, and the enemy cleverly took advantage of the resulting confusion to recapture Fuentes d'Oñoro, which would not have happened if the generals had followed Masséna's order to line the windows with infantry. Night put an end to this first engagement, in which we had 600 men disabled; the enemy's loss was about the same, and fell chiefly upon their best troops, the Highlanders. Colonel Williams was killed.

I could never understand how Wellington consented to await the French in so unfavourable a position as that in which General Spencer's incapacity had placed the troops. The allies had in fact in their rear not only the fortress of Alameda barring their only good line of retreat, but also the Coa, a stream with steep banks and difficult approaches, which might have caused the entire loss of the army if it had been compelled to retreat. It is true that the steep and deep ravine of the Dos Casas protected the English front from Fort Concepcion to Nave de Avel, but beyond that point the sides of the ravine fall away and sink to a marsh which is easy to cross. Even so, Wellington might have used it to cover his extreme right if he had defended it with a good regiment supported by artillery, but forgetting the harm which had resulted at Busaco from assigning to Trant's irregulars the task of preventing the French from making a flank march by Boialva, he fell into the same error again when he entrusted the defence of the marsh to the irregular bands of Don Julian, who were quite unfit to resist troops of the line. On hearing of this negligence through a cavalry

patrol, Masséna ordered everything to be got ready for crossing the marsh at daybreak the next morning, in order to take the enemy's right wing in rear. Plenty of fascines were constructed during the night, and the 8th corps, with part of the 9th, marched in silence towards Nave de Avel, Ferey's division remaining before Oñoro, which was still occupied by the enemy.

At daybreak on May 5 a company of light infantry, slipping through the willows and the reeds, crossed the marsh noiselessly, and, passing the fascines along, filled up the bad places, which turned out to be much fewer in number than we had supposed. Don Julian and his guerrillas, deeming themselves secure behind the marsh, kept such a bad watch that our people found them asleep and killed some thirty of them. All the rest of the band, instead of keeping up a smart fire, if only to warn the English, took to its heels and fled beyond the Turones, and Don Julian, brave as he was, could not keep his undisciplined soldiers in hand. Profiting by Wellington's negligence, our troops hastened to cross the marsh, and we had on the other side four divisions of infantry, all Montbrun's cavalry with several batteries, and were in possession of Nave de Avel before the English found it out. This was one of the finest movements which Masséna ever devised, the last flicker of an expiring lamp.

By our passage of the marsh the enemy's right was completely out-flanked, and Wellington's situation became extremely difficult. Not only had he to execute a huge change of front to meet those of our divisions which were occupying Nave de Avel and Pozo Velho, but he was compelled to leave part of his troops before Fuentes d'Oñoro and Alameda to check Erlon's and Reynier's corps, which were making ready to cross the Dos Casas and attack the enemy during their evolutions. Lord Wellington had so fully believed his extreme right wing to be sheltered by the marsh, that he had only left a few cavalry scouts at that point, but seeing that wing turned he made haste to send forward towards Pozo Velho the first infantry brigade that came to hand. This advanced guard was overthrown and

cut to pieces by our cavalry under Montbrun. General Mancune, following up this advance, flung himself into the wood of Pozo Velho, driving from it the Highlanders with a loss of 250 prisoners and 100 killed. Thus everything was promising a brilliant victory for the French when a discussion arose between Generals Loison and Montbrun, and the latter stayed the march of the cavalry reserve under the plea that the batteries of the Guard which had been promised him had not yet come up. In point of fact, Marshal Bessières had detained them without letting Masséna know, and he, learning of the difficulty too late, sent several guns to Montbrun. The delay, however, was doubly fatal to us, first because Loison's infantry, seeing that it was no longer supported by Montbrun's cavalry, hesitated to engage in the plain, while in the second place this disastrous halt gave Wellington time to bring up all his cavalry to support Houstoun's and Craufurd's divisions, which alone were as yet in position before us. Meantime, by Masséna's orders, General Montbrun, covering his artillery with some squadrons of hussars, advanced afresh, and, suddenly unmasking his guns, tore up Houstoun's division, and when it began to waver charged it with Wathiez' and Fournier's brigades. These cut the 51st regiment almost entirely to pieces, and completely routed the rest of Houstoun's division. The fugitives reached Villa Formosa on the left bank of the Turones, and owed their safety solely to the regiment of *chasseurs Britanniques*, who, ranged behind a long and stout stone wall, stayed the dash of our troopers by a fire no less well sustained than aimed.

In this part of the field Wellington had now only Craufurd's division and the cavalry, the rest of his army, which had been taken in rear, not having as yet completed the immense change of front necessary to bring them into line against the French. As the ground on which they were now fighting had been, until we crossed the marsh, the least exposed part, the English commissariat and the wounded, the servants, baggage and led horses, the soldiers who had got separated from their regiments, were crowded together

there, and the vast plain as far as the Turones was covered with a disorderly multitude, in the midst of which the three squares formed by Craufurd's infantry looked like mere specks; and there we had, within cannon-shot, and all ready to charge the enemy, the corps of Loison and Junot, 5,000 cavalry, and 4 field-batteries into the bargain. The 8th corps was already clear of the wood of Pozo Velho, the 9th was vigorously attacking the village of Fuentes d'Oñoro by the right bank of the Dos Casas, and General Reynier had orders to debouch by Alameda, and take the English in the rear. We had only to march forward. Indeed, Napier, who was present at this battle, admits that, during the whole war, there was no moment of such danger for the British army. But blind Fortune decided otherwise. General Loison, instead of marching by the left bank to take Fuentes d'Oñoro in rear, while Drouet d'Erlon attacked in front, lost much time and made false movements which allowed Wellington to reinforce that important point—the key, indeed, of the position. General Reynier, on his side, did not carry out Masséna's orders; for, under the plea that he had too strong a force in front of him, he never went beyond Alameda, and took scarcely any part in the action. In spite of all these mishaps, so great were our advantages that it was yet possible to win the battle. Montbrun's cavalry, having beaten that of the enemy, soon found itself in presence of Craufurd's infantry. It charged and broke two squares, cutting one literally to pieces.' The men of the 2nd threw down their arms and fled to the plain; Colonel Hill surrendered his sword to Staff-Adjutant Dulimberg of the 13th Chasseurs, and we took 1,500 prisoners. The third English square held firm. Montbrun caused Fournier's and Wathiez' brigades to attack it, and they had pierced one of the faces when both generals had their horses killed under them and all the colonels were wounded, so that there was nobody to take charge of the victorious regiments. Montbrun hastened up, but the enemy's square had been reformed, and, in order to attack it, he would have to reform his own squadrons. While he was thus engaged, Masséna sent an aide-de-camp

to General Lepic, in command of the reserve cavalry of the Guard, with orders to charge. But Lepic, biting his sword-blade in desperation, replied, with much regret, that his immediate chief, Marshal Bessières, had forbidden him to take the Guard into action without his order. Ten aides-de-camp went off in every direction to look for Bessières; but he, after being for some days always at Masséna's side, had now disappeared. This was not owing to any want of courage, but of set design, or from a jealousy which made him unmindful of the interest of France and unwilling to send a single man under his command in order to secure a victory the credit of which would fall to his comrade. At last, after a quarter of an hour, Bessières was discovered at a distance from the field of battle, wandering on the further side of the marsh, and examining the construction of the fascines which had been used in the morning. He hastened up with a show of earnestness, but the decisive moment had been missed, through his fault, and did not recur. The English had recovered from the disorder caused by Montbrun's charge, and had brought up a powerful artillery which was playing our squadrons with grape, while their men were recapturing the prisoners whom we had taken. In short, Lord Wellington's change of front was completed, and his army in its new position on the plateau, with its right resting on the Turones, its left on Fuentes d'Oñoro.[1]

At the sight of this new and solidly-constituted line, Masséna halted his troops and opened a heavy cannonade, causing much destruction in the enemy's ranks. A general charge of our cavalry might have crushed them, and Masséna hoped that Bessières would at last allow the regiment of the Guard to take part in this 'pull all together,' which would infallibly have given us the victory. But Bessières refused, saying that he was responsible to the Emperor for any losses which his Guard might incur, as if all the army were not in

[1 It will be seen that, while General Marbot's account of this battle agrees in substance with Napier's—from which, indeed, several passages are very literally copied—the order of events has been somewhat dislocated and their relative importance confused.]

the Emperor's service, and the essential point with him were not to hear that the English had been driven out of the Peninsula! All the soldiers, those of the Guard most of all, were indignant at Bessières' decision, wanting to know what that marshal had come before Almeida for, if he did not wish his troops to take part in the fighting which was to save the place. This unexpected mishap changed the complexion of affairs at once; every moment the English were receiving reinforcements, and one of their divisions, coming from the force blockading Almeida, had just crossed the Turones, and was forming in the plain. The position of the two armies being thus altered, Masséna's dispositions had to be altered likewise. He resolved, therefore, to move the bulk of his troops towards Almeida, and, joining Reynier, to fall upon the right and rear of the enemy. This was the counterpart of the previous night's movement on Nave de Avel; but a new obstacle hindered its execution. General Eblé, commanding the artillery, hurried up with the news that he had, at the artillery park, not more than four cartridges per man, which, with those left in their pouches, gave not more than a score to each soldier. This was an insufficient supply with which to renew the struggle against a foe who was sure to resist desperately, and Masséna ordered every wagon to be sent instantly to Rodrigo for ammunition. But the commissary-general reported that he had made use of them to fetch from the same place the bread required for the morrow's supply. Having no other means of transport, Masséna asked Bessières to lend him the Guard's ammunition-wagons for a few hours; but he replied that his teams were already tired, and that a night march over bad roads would finish them—he could not lend them till the next day. Masséna flew into a rage, exclaiming that victory was being snatched from him a second time; but Bessières maintained his refusal, and a violent scene took place between the two marshals.

At daybreak on the 6th, Bessières' wagons started for Rodrigo; but they moved so slowly that the cartridges did not come till the afternoon, and Wellington had employed

the twenty-four hours in entrenching his new position, especially the upper part of the village of Fuentes d'Oñoro. It could not now be taken save at the expense of torrents of French blood, and the opportunity of victory was hopelessly lost to us.

CHAPTER XVIII

When it became clear that there could be no question of another battle, or of re-victualling Almeida, it became Masséna's duty to try at least to save the garrison of the place after destroying the fortifications. To this end some means must be found of communicating with the governor—a task which, as the town was strongly invested, was difficult, if not impossible. Three brave men, whose names deserve to be recorded in our annals, volunteered for the perilous duty of passing through the enemy's camp, and carrying to General Brénier instructions with regard to the evacuation. These three intrepid soldiers were Pierre Zaniboni, corporal of the 76th, Jean Noel Lami, a canteen-man in Ferey's division, and André Tillet, of the 6th Light Infantry. They had all taken part in the siege of Almeida the year before, and knew the surrounding district thoroughly. They were to take different roads, and each bore a letter in cipher to the governor. They started at nightfall on the 6th; Zaniboni disguised as a Spanish pedlar, for he spoke the language well, slipped into the English bivouacs on the plea of selling tobacco and buying dead men's clothes; Lami, as a Portuguese peasant, played much the same part at another part of the English lines. This kind of petty trade is common in all armies, and the two Frenchmen went from line to line without awaking any suspicion. Just as they were drawing near the gates of Almeida, however, the trick was discovered—in what manner has never been explained—the poor fellows were searched, and being convicted by the letters found on them, were shot as spies, according to the law of war which punishes with death every soldier who lays aside his uniform when on duty.

Tillet, with better judgment than his unhappy comrades,

started in uniform, with his sword. Following at first the deep gorge of the Dos Casas stream, up to his waist in the water, he crept slowly from rock to rock, hiding himself behind them at the least sound, until he was near the ruined Fort Concepcion. There, leaving the stream, he crawled on all fours through the full corn, and at length reached the outworks of Almeida, being received there at dawn on the 17th by the French outposts. The letter which he bore to General Brénier contained the order to blow up the ramparts, and retire forthwith on Barba del Puerco, whither Reynier's troops were to precede him. The arrival of his emissary was to be announced to Masséna by salvos of the heaviest guns, and on hearing these the marshal made the necessary preparations for retreating on Ciudad Rodrigo, being assured of the imminent demolition of the ramparts. These operations take some time, as the ramparts must be mined, the chambers of the mines charged, ammunition, artillery and gun-carriages destroyed, and so on. We had therefore to wait till the noise of the cannon let us know that Brénier was evacuating the place, and the two armies remained facing each other for four days without any further action. The English asked for a suspension of hostilities to bury the dead—a homage to brave warriors which all civilised nations ought to practise. In the plain the English corpses were by far the more in number; but it was quite otherwise in the village, where the enemy had fought sheltered by houses and garden-walls. Many wounded were picked up on both sides; among ours was Captain Septeuil, an aide-de-camp to Berthier, who had, like Canouville, been sent from Paris to Masséna. He was still more unlucky, for his leg was smashed by a round-shot, and had to be amputated on the field. He bore the operation bravely and is still living.

Seeing the French army remain stationary in front of him for several days, and doubtless hearing the salvos from Almeida, Wellington perceived that Masséna intended to facilitate the escape of the garrison. He therefore reinforced the blockading division, and gave General Campbell, who was in command of it, orders so well devised that if they

had been duly carried out Brénier and his troops would have had small chance of escape. At midnight on the 10th a long, dull, explosion announced to the French army that Almeida existed no longer—at least, as a fortress. In order to puzzle the allies, General Brénier had kept them occupied for several days past on the side opposite to that by which he intended to make his escape. This was carried out without disaster, and it was the same at first with his retreat, which he led, guiding himself by the moon and the direction of the streams. He had come within a short distance of General Heudelet's division, which Masséna had sent to meet him, when he fell in with a Portuguese brigade. He attacked and dispersed it, continuing his retreat swiftly; but General Pack, warned by the sound of musketry, hastened up from Malpartida and pursued our columns, firing. Quickly, too, General Cotton's cavalry made a vigorous attack on the rear-guard, causing it some loss. Our people at length caught sight of the bridge of Barba del Puerco, and Heudelet's division advancing to meet them. Believing themselves saved, they gave vent to their joy; but it was written that the soil of Portugal was yet to be watered with French blood.

The last of our columns had to pass through a defile opening into a quarry among steep and pointed rocks. The enemy was pressing on from all sides, and several sections of our rear-guard were cut off by the English cavalry. Seeing this, the French soldiers climbed nimbly up the steep sides of the ravine, and escaped the English cavalry, only to fall into another danger. The Portuguese infantry pursued them on the heights, pouring a murderous fire into them. When at length our men, on the point of being succoured by Heudelet's division, thought that they were in sight of safety, the earth suddenly failed under their feet, engulfing part of them in a yawning chasm, at the foot of a huge rock. The head of the pursuing Portuguese column incurred the same fate, rolling pell-mell into the gulf with our people. Heudelet's division succeeded in forcing the allied troops back beyond the sight of this disaster, and when the foot of

the precipice was explored, a fearful sight appeared. Three hundred French and Portuguese soldiers lay there, dead or horribly mutilated. Some sixty French and thirty Portuguese alone survived this terrible fall. Such was the last incident in the laborious and unlucky campaign of the French in Portugal. They never entered the country again. Masséna's army, leaving the battlefield of Fuentes d'Oñoro, retreated towards Ciudad Rodrigo, and went into cantonments, the English not following. We learnt, later on, that Wellington, angry with General Campbell for having, as he said, by neglect of his orders allowed the garrison of Almeida to escape, had brought that general to court-martial, and that Campbell, in despair, had blown his brains out.[1]

Scarcely was the French army in quarters where it could rest and recruit, than Masséna began to think of reorganising it, with a view to a fresh campaign. The work was, however, barely set on foot, when Marshal Marmont arrived from Paris. Though he held his appointment to the commander-in-chief, he presented himself at first as Ney's successor in the command of the 6th corps; then, a few days later, when he was sufficiently acquainted with the state of affairs, he produced his commission, and handed to Masséna the Emperor's order, recalling him to Paris. This unforeseen disgrace, announced in such a way indicating that the Emperor did not approve his conduct of the operations, was a crushing blow to Masséna, but he was compelled to surrender the command to Marmont, and, taking leave of the army, he retired, in the first place, to Salamanca, after a very lively altercation with General Foy, whom he accused of having made common cause with Ney to do him a disservice with the Emperor.

On learning how vigorously General Brénier had led the retreat of the garrison of Almeida, the Emperor appointed him lieutenant-general. He rewarded also Tillet's

[1 Campbell died, Governor of Madras, in 1825. The person who blew his brains out was the lieutenant-colonel of the 4th King's Own.]

devotion and courage with the Cross of the Legion of Honour and a pension of six hundred francs. This second favour was, in later days, the subject of a discussion in the Chamber. Tillet had become a sergeant, and had obtained a retiring pension under the Restoration. It was proposed to dock him of this by applying the law as to 'pluralities,' but General Foy eloquently pleaded the cause of the brave soldier, and he kept both his pensions.

Masséna stayed a short time at Salamanca, and proceeded to Paris. On his arrival, he called upon the Emperor, who, under the plea of urgent affairs, refused for a whole month to see him. His disgrace was complete. No doubt, Masséna had committed very grave mistakes, especially in his march upon Lisbon; but it must be admitted also that the Government had done very wrong to abandon his army in a country so bare of resources as Portugal, and not to secure his communications by means of troops echelonned between his army and the Spanish frontier. At any rate Masséna rose in the opinion of his troops during the expedition undertaken to relieve Almeida. Not only was his strategy often very fine, but he showed much activity, having no more anxiety about Mme N——, whom he had left at the rear, and being able to give all his attention to the war. Still, I shall take leave to point out several faults which he committed during that expedition. In the first place, it was undertaken with insufficient means of transport, both for provisions and ammunition. It has been said that draught-horses were wanting; this is true, but there were plenty of mules in the district, which might have been requisitioned for a few days. Next was the fatal mistake occasioned by the red coats of the Hanoverians. As the same had already happened at Busaco, Masséna should have made them wear their grey overcoats before sending them into Oñoro to fight the English. By this amount of foresight, he would have retained the whole village; as it was, we lost the upper part, and could not retake it. Thirdly, when Masséna was master of a great part of the plain, and of the whole course of the Dos Casas, except the point where it passes through

Fuentes d'Oñoro, he was, as I think, quite wrong to lose precious time and many men in seeking to drive the English entirely out of that strongly-intrenched village. I think that it would have been better worth while, following the example of Marlborough at Malplaquet, to have left a brigade to observe Oñoro, out of range of its fire, and to hold the garrison, and to have advanced. They would have thought themselves on the point of being surrounded, and would have been compelled to abandon the position, and rejoin Wellington, or run the risk of having to capitulate after the defeat of the English army. The important thing for us was to beat the main body of the enemy's troops in the open country. Unluckily, however, it is a principle with the French never to leave an intrenched position behind them in battle. This habit has often been fatal to us here, and, above all, at Waterloo, where we persisted in attacking the farms of La Haye-Sainte and Hougoumont, instead of masking them with a division, and marching upon the already severely-shaken English lines. We should have had time to destroy them before the Prussians came up, and to secure the victory, after which the defenders of the farms would have had to lay down their arms, as our troops had to do at Malplaquet. The fourth mistake with which Masséna may be blamed, at the battle of Fuentes d'Oñoro, was not making sure that there were a sufficient number of cartridges in his wagons. Failing this, he should have fetched them from Ciudad Rodrigo, which was not more than three leagues from the point where we were going to fight. This lack of foresight was one of the principal causes of our failure. Fifthly, if Masséna had still possessed the firmness of which he so often gave proof at Rivoli, Genoa, and Zurich, he would have put General Reynier under arrest for disobedience to orders, and the command of the second corps would have passed to General Heudelet, who would have pushed the English hard and promptly. But Masséna did not venture to take such vigorous action; the conqueror of Souvaroff had lost his energy, and let himself be defied with impunity, and the

blood of his soldiers was shed to no advantage and with no glory.

It forms no part of my purpose in writing these memoirs to relate the various phases of the War of Independence in the Peninsula; but before quitting that country, I ought to point out the chief causes of the reverses sustained there by the French, in spite of the fact that our troops nowhere showed more zeal, more patience—above all, more valour.

It is needless again to go over the events of 1808 and the following year, but it may be observed that if after the expulsion of the English, under Sir John Moore, from Spain, the Emperor had himself been able to go on directing the operations, the Peninsula must have quickly succumbed. The Cabinet of London had, however, cleverly raised a new and potent enemy, and when Austria declared war, Napoleon was compelled to leave the task of repressing the insurrection in the hands of his lieutenants. King Joseph's lack of military capacity prevented any concentration of command, and complete anarchy reigned among the marshals and the various corps commanders, each confining himself to the defence of the provinces occupied by his troops, and refusing any aid to his colleagues who governed the neighbouring districts. The most peremptory orders from the Emperor were unable to produce any co-operation, there was no obedience, and each asserted that he himself needed all the resources at his disposal. Thus Saint-Cyr was nearly crushed in Catalonia without the support of a single battalion from Suchet, who was governing Aragon and Valencia; Soult, as you have seen, was left alone in Oporto, while Victor refused to obey the order to join him. Soult, in his turn, allowed Masséna to wait for him for six months in vain at the gates of Lisbon; finally, Masséna could not obtain help from Bessières to beat the English before Almeida. I could quote many more examples of selfish disobedience, but it must be admitted that the main fault lay with the Government. It was natural that, in 1809, the Emperor should have left Spain in order

to meet the most pressing danger, but why, when peace was concluded in the north, did he not see the importance of returning to drive the English from the Peninsula? The most surprising thing is, that with all his genius he should have thought it possible to direct from Paris the movement of armies 500 leagues away, in a country where bearers of despatches were liable to be stopped by swarms of insurgents, and commanders-in-chief thus compelled to remain for months without news or orders. If the Emperor could not come himself, he should have entrusted the chief command of all the armies in the Peninsula to one of his best marshals, with power severely to punish disobedience. Napoleon had no doubt made Joseph his titular lieutenant, but he, a man of gentle disposition, clever and well-educated, but having no knowledge of the art of war, had become the plaything of the marshals. They did not execute his orders, and considered his very presence with the army as a hindrance. The worst mistake into which the King's good-nature led him was that of opposing the Emperor's wish with regard to Spanish soldiers captured in battle. Napoleon ordered them to be sent into France as prisoners of war, in order to diminish the numbers of our enemies in the Peninsula, while Joseph, hating to fight against men whom he called his subjects, would defend the Spaniards against us. When they were captured they were ready enough to cheer for their good King Joseph and ask to serve among his troops. He actually created a numerous army, composed exclusively of prisoners whom he had taken, well paid, well fed, and well equipped. They were loyal to Joseph as long as things went well, but at the first reverse they deserted in thousands and went off to join their insurgent compatriots until they were taken prisoners again. Then they again begged to enlist in Joseph's regiments. More than 150,000 men changed sides in this way, and as Joseph had them promptly re-clothed when they came back in rags, the Spaniards nick-named him 'the head of the army clothing department.' The French troops objected strongly to this system, and the Emperor often expressed his discontent with it, but he could never

succeed in stopping it. He, on his side, contributed much to the perpetual recruiting of the enemy, for not wishing to reduce too much the French army in Germany, he called on his allies to furnish part of the contingents stipulated for in the treaties, and sent these troops to the Peninsula in order to spare French blood. His motive was doubtless laudable, but circumstances made the application of this system injurious to our cause. It is all very well to employ foreign troops in a short campaign, but it is a different thing when it is a question of fighting for several years against an enemy like the Spaniards and Portuguese who were always harassing you and could never be got at. Nothing but an ardour such as is never found in auxiliary troops can enable men to endure the fatigues of this kind of warfare. Thus not only did the troops which the Emperor obtained from his allies serve badly enough in our ranks, but they deserted daily in heaps. Italians, Swiss, Saxons, Bavarians, and other Germans were soon formed into regiments by our enemies, and the Poles passed in such numbers into the well-paid and well-fed English army, that Wellington was able to form a strong Polish legion, which fought the French without scruple.

But, in my opinion, the principal cause of our reverses, though one which has never been pointed out by any soldier who has written on the Peninsular War, was the immense superiority of the English infantry in accurate shooting, a superiority which arises from their frequent exercise at the targets, and in a great measure also from the formation in two ranks. I know that a great many French officers deny that this latter cause is a true one, but experience has shown that soldiers confined between the first and third rank nearly always fire in the air, and that the third rank cannot take aim at an enemy who is hidden from them by the two ranks in front. It is asserted that two ranks do not offer sufficient strength to resist cavalry, but the English infantry can in a moment form four deep to receive a charge, and our squadrons were *never* able to catch it in two ranks, though as soon as it has to fire it quickly resumes this formation.

However this may be, I am convinced that Napoleon

would in the end have established his brother triumphantly on the throne of Spain if he had been content to finish this war before going to Russia. The Peninsula received no support, save from England, and England, in spite of the recent successes of her armies, was so exhausted by the incessant demands of men and money for the Peninsula, that the House of Commons was on the point of refusing the necessary subsidies for a new campaign. But at the moment of our return from Portugal rumours had got about of the design formed by Napoleon of attacking Russia at home, and the English Parliament authorised the continuance of the war. It was not fortunate for us, for the misunderstandings which I have noticed still prevailed among our commanders. Marshal Marmont got beaten by Wellington at the Arapiles, King Joseph lost the battle of Vittoria, and these reverses compelled our armies towards the end of 1813 to re-cross the Pyrenees and abandon entirely the country which had cost them so much blood. I judge that in the six years from the beginning of 1808, the French lost in the Peninsula 200,000 men killed or dead in hospital, to which one must add 60,000 lost by our various allies.

The English and the Portuguese lost also considerably, but the Spaniards most of all, by reason of the obstinacy with which they withstood the siege of many of their towns. The vigour of these famous defences, particularly that of Saragossa, has thrown such lustre over the Spaniards that the delivery of the Peninsula has generally been attributed to their courage, but this is a mistake, for without the support of English troops the Spaniards would never have resisted the French. One immense merit they have, which is that they are never discouraged. Their confidence, often deceived, cannot be destroyed. Our soldiers used to compare them to flocks of pigeons, which fly away at the least sound, to return a moment later. As for the Portuguese, justice has never been done to the share which they took in the war. Less cruel, far better disciplined, and more calmly courageous than the Spaniards, they formed in Wellington's army several brigades which, when led by English officers, were in no way

inferior to the British troops; but being less boastful than the Spaniards, they have said less about their exploits, and have acquired less renown.

But less us return for a moment to June 1811, when Masséna resigned his command. The war in the Peninsula was so disagreeable and so toilsome that every man longed to get back to France. The Emperor, knowing this, and wishing to keep his army up to its full strength, had decided that no officer was to leave Spain without special leave, and the order recalling Masséna authorised him to bring away only two aides-de-camp, and to leave the others at Marshal Marmont's disposal. He, having his staff complete, and knowing none of us, was no more anxious to keep us than we to stay with him. He assigned us no duties, and we passed some three weeks at Salamanca drearily enough. The time seemed, however, less long to me than to my companions, because I employed it in committing my recollections of the recent campaign to paper. I have found these notes very useful in writing these memoirs.

In consideration of my wound the minister at last sent me leave to return to France. Some others of Masséna's staff having also been permitted to leave the Peninsula, we joined a detachment of 500 grenadiers, who were on their way to reinforce the imperial guard. General Junot and his wife the duchess also took advantage of this escort. We travelled easily on horseback, with fine weather. On the journey some eccentric conduct on the part of Junot made me anxious as to his future.[1] We reached the frontier, and I could not but smile when I thought of the evil omen which I had drawn from my encounter with the black jackass on the Bidassoa bridge when last I entered Spain. The campaign had nearly been my last, but I was in France and should see my mother and another who had become very dear to me. So, forgetting past troubles, I hastened on to Paris, arriving in July, after an absence of fifteen toilsome months. Contrary to my expectation the marshal received me well, and I learnt that he had spoken very kindly of me to the Emperor.

[1 See vol. i. p. 295.]

So on my first appearance at the Tuileries, the Emperor expressed his satisfaction with me, spoke with interest of Miranda de Corvo, and asked how many wounds I had now had. 'Eight, sir,' I answered. 'Well, they are eight good quarterings of nobility for you,' rejoined the Emperor.

CHAPTER XIX

I SPENT all the summer and autumn at Paris, passing some days of every month at the château of Bonneuil with M. and Mme Desbrières. While I was away, this excellent family had shown great friendship for my mother, and before long I was permitted to pay my addresses to their daughter. Our marriage was arranged, and for a moment I hoped to obtain my promotion to colonel before the event took place.

According to etiquette the Emperor signed the marriage contracts of all his colonels, but he rarely paid this honour to officers of a lower rank; if they wished for it they had to acquaint the Minister for War with their reasons. I based my application on the fact of the Emperor having said to me just before Marengo, and soon after my father's death, 'If you behave well, and follow in his footsteps, it will be I who will act as your father.' Since that day I had been eight times wounded, and was conscious of having always done my duty. Clarke, the minister, a rough man, who nearly always rejected such applications, admitted that mine deserved consideration, and promised to present it. In a few days I was ordered to present myself at Compiègne and bring the notary with the marriage contract. When we arrived, the Emperor was out coursing—not that he cared much for this exercise, but he rightly thought that he ought to imitate the old French kings. The matter had therefore to be put off till the next day, at which the notary, who had business in Paris, was much distressed; but there was no help for it. Next day we were presented to the Emperor, and my marriage contract was signed in the room where, twenty years later, I was often on duty with the Orleans princes.

In these short interviews Napoleon was most affable.

He asked several questions of the notary: inquired if the young lady was pretty, what was her dowry, and so on; and when I took leave he said that he would like me to have a good post, and that he would, before long, reward me for my good service. Then I did think that I was as good as colonel; and my hopes rose higher yet when, as I left the room, General Mouton, Count of Lobau, assured me that my name was on the list of field-officers who were to receive regiments, an assurance all the more welcome that the Count of Lobau was in charge of that department of the War Office which dealt with promotions. I returned to Paris, therefore, with a joyful heart, and was married on November 11.

Happy in the bosom of my family, I was daily awaiting my commission as colonel, when I was informed by the minister that I had been appointed as major to the 1st Mounted Chasseurs, then in garrison at the other end of Germany. This was a severe blow. As a major I had already been thrice wounded and served two campaigns, and it was hard to have to serve again with that rank, nor, after what the Emperor and the Count of Lobau had said, could I understand why I was thus treated. However, the latter soon explained it.

After the promotion of Pelet and Casabianca, I was the senior major on Masséna's staff. But M. Barain, the artillery captain, whom I have mentioned as having lost an arm at Wagram, and who, though he had been promoted to major with a view to his service in the arsenals, had insisted on accompanying Masséna to Portugal, possessed relations whose influence with the marshal was considerable. Through his intervention Masséna was persuaded to recommend Barain for promotion, and the Emperor, yielding with some hesitation to the same influence, made him colonel.

If I have seemed to make too much of my disappointment over this affair it must be remembered that at that time the commanders of regiments were important persons. I have known several colonels decline the rank of general, and ask as a special favour to be left at the head of their regiments.

From Masséna I received the following letter, as my sole reward for three campaigns served under him and three wounds received:

Paris, *November* 24, 1811.

My Dear Marbot,—I forward your commission, which has been sent to me. As you know, I asked for your promotion; and it is a matter of twofold regret to me that I failed to obtain it, and that I am losing your services. I appreciate them highly, and, so far as you are concerned, they are independent of the rewards which they entitle you to claim, and will always earn you the esteem of those under whom you may happen to serve. You may be sure of mine, and equally sure of my regret and my sincere attachment,

Masséna.

I did not expect to see him again; but the maréchale wishing, as she wrote, to make my wife's acquaintance, invited us to dinner. Of her I have nothing but good to say, ever since I met her at Antibes, her native place, on my way back from Genoa; so I accepted. Masséna came up to me with fresh expressions of regret, and proposed that he should apply for my nomination as officer of the Legion of Honour. I replied that, as he could do nothing for me when I was on his staff, I would not trouble him further, and would try to secure my promotion for myself; and so slipped off into the crowd of guests. I never met the marshal again, though I continued to visit his wife and son, who were both my very good friends.

I may as well give here some details of Masséna's life. As is usually the case with famous men, his biography has been very incorrectly written. André Masséna was born May 6, 1758, at Turbia, near Monaco. His grandfather, a respectable tanner, had three sons, Jules, Augustin, and Marcel. The two elder went to Nice and set up a soap-factory; Marcel entered the French service; Jules died poor, and of his five children, three, including André, were taken up by the uncle, Augustin, who, after having them taught to read and write, employed them in his soap-works. André,

however, was of too adventurous a disposition to settle to business, and at the age of thirteen ran away from his uncle's house, and went to sea as a cabin-boy in a merchantman, accompanied by a cousin named Bavastro, who became in the wars of the Empire the most famous privateer in the Mediterranean. As for André, two years of hardship disgusted him with a sailor's life, and in 1775 he enlisted as a private in the Royal Italian regiment, where his uncle Marcel was sergeant-major. I knew this Marcel Masséna in 1800, when he was commandant of the fortress of Antibes. He was a serious and able man, much esteemed by his colonel, M. Chauvet d'Arlon. The colonel kindly extended his patronage to André, put him in the way of acquiring a fair knowledge of French, and in a few years promoted him to regimental staff-sergeant. He even held out to him the hope of becoming sub-lieutenant in the mounted police; but André was tired of waiting, and left the army when his time expired. On returning to civil life he rejoined his cousin Bavastro; and the two together carried on a smuggling business on a large scale, both by sea and across the land frontier. In this way Masséna acquired a thorough knowledge of the mountain paths, which was of great service to him later on, when he commanded troops in those districts. The hard life of a smuggler, with its constant need for keeping an eye on the movements of the preventive men and concealing his own, insensibly produced in Masséna the intelligence, watchfulness, and activity so essential to a good officer. Having amassed a little capital he married a Frenchwoman, Mlle Lamarre, daughter of a surgeon at Antibes, and was settled in that town, doing a small trade in olive oil and dried fruits, when the Revolution supervened. Then, under the impulse of his military tastes, he left his wife and his shop and enlisted in the volunteers of the Var. His knowledge of military theory and practice soon earned him the post of adjutant, and when war broke out his courage and activity quickly raised him to the rank of colonel and then of major-general. He commanded the camp called *des milles fourches*, which comprised the artillery company commanded by Captain

Napoleon Buonaparte, under whom he was in after days to serve in Italy. At the siege of Toulon he distinguished himself by taking Forts Lartigues and St. Catherine, earning his promotion to lieutenant-general, and after the capture of the town returned to the Army of Italy, and was conspicuous in all the engagements between the Mediterranean coast and Piedmont.

Intelligent, restlessly active, and of undaunted courage, Masséna had become a famous man, but a serious mistake committed early in the campaign of 1796 went near to ruin his whole career. General Bonaparte had just taken the chief command of the army, which brought his former superior, Masséna, under his orders. Masséna was commanding the advanced guard, and had beaten an Austrian corps near Cairo. Learning that the enemy's officers had left a good supper all ready prepared in a neighbouring village inn, he and some of his officers thought they would take advantage of this windfall. They left the division encamped on the top of a high hill; but meantime, the Austrians having recovered from their alarm returned to the attack at daybreak, and charged the French corps. Our men, though taken by surprise, defended themselves bravely, but as their general was not there to lead them, they were pushed back to the edge of the plateau, and would certainly have been heavily defeated by the superior number of the enemy. Just then, Masséna, having made his way through the Austrian skirmishers, hurried up by a path which he knew of old, and appeared in front of his troops. In their indignation they received him with well-deserved hootings, but the general, little perturbed, resumed the command, and marched forward with his division to rejoin the army. It was then seen that one battalion, which had been posted the day before on an isolated spur, had no practicable road by which they could descend without going a long way round, and exposing themselves to the enemy's fire. Masséna made his way alone, climbing the steep slope on hands and knees, towards this battalion, and on reaching it addressed the men, assuring them that if they would do as he did, he would get them out of their fix. Then,

ordering them to sheath bayonets, he sat down on the snow at the edge of the slope, and, pushing himself with his hands, slid down to the bottom. The soldiers, shouting with laughter, did the same thing, and in the twinkling of an eye the whole battalion was out of range of the astonished Austrians. This way of descending, much like that which the Swiss peasants call glissading,[1] had certainly never before been employed by regular troops. Extraordinary as it may seem, the story is none the less true; I have not only been assured of it by various generals and other officers who were then in Masséna's division, but nine years afterwards, when Marshal Augereau received the Emperor and all the marshals at La Houssage, I heard them chaffing Masséna about the new mode of retreat which he used on that occasion. It is stated that on the day when Masséna employed this comical expedient, to which he had been well accustomed in his smuggling days, General Bonaparte, thinking that as a very young commander-in-chief it was his duty to show especial severity towards officers who failed in their duty, gave orders that Masséna should be tried by court-martial on a charge of having abandoned his post, which would involve the penalty of death, or at least, dismissal. But just as he was about to be put under arrest, the battle of Montenotte began, and after the complete rout of the Austrian army, to which Masséna so largely contributed, there could not well be any talk of trying him. So his fault was forgotten, and he was able to continue his glorious career.

He distinguished himself at Lodi, Milan, Verona, Arcola, but above all, at Rivoli, and his success gained him from General Bonaparte the famous nickname, 'The spoilt child of victory.' After the preliminaries of peace had been signed at Lisbon, he was commissioned to take the draft to the Government, and was received in Paris with the strongest marks of admiration. But his triumph was tarnished by his always prevailing fault of extreme avarice. General Duphot, French ambassador at Rome, had been assassinated; the task of

[1 In the original '*la ramasse*,' a word which does not seem to be now in use.]

taking vengeance was entrusted to part of the Army of Italy, under the command, at first, of Berthier, and when he was called away to Egypt, of Masséna. Very soon after the arrival of that general, the army began to complain that it was in a state of destitution, without clothing or food, while those who had the management were drawing millions from the Papal States and living in luxury. At length, a deputation of one hundred officers was sent to demand from Masséna an account of his expenditure; but whether he had no defence to offer, or refused to recognise an act of insubordination, he declined to clear himself, and as the troops persisted, found himself obliged to leave Rome, and surrender the command of the army. On his return to France he published a justificatory statement, addressed to his comrades, but neither they nor the public accepted it; and his annoyance was increased when Bonaparte started for Egypt without replying to a letter which he wrote him on the subject.

However, when war again broke out with the coalition formed by England, Russia, and Austria, Masséna's military talents could not well be spared, and the Directory lost no time in putting him in command of the force to which the defence of Switzerland was to be entrusted. After some considerable successes, he was beaten with loss by the Austrians, in consequence of an over-hasty attack on the defile of Feldkirch. At the same time the Army of the Rhine, under Jourdan, was defeated by the Archduke Charles at Stockach, and that of Italy, at Novi, by Souvaroff, General Joubert being killed. The Austrians were threatening Alsace and Lorraine; Souvaroff was crossing the St. Gothard into Switzerland; and France, on the point of being invaded in two quarters, felt that her only hope was in Masséna, nor was her hope disappointed.

Bernadotte and the Directory impatiently sent messenger after messenger with orders to Masséna to give battle;[1] but he, knowing that the defeat of his army would mean irretrievable ruin to the country, allowed no threats of dis-

[1 See vol. i. p. 22.]

missal to move him. Like Fabius or Catinat, he would not strike till he could strike decisively, taking advantage of some opportunity when he might for a moment have the superiority. The moment came when the incapable General Korsakoff had imprudently advanced on Zurich with 50,000 Russians and Bavarians, there to await Souvaroff, who was bringing 55,000 men from Italy. Flinging himself like a lion on Korsakoff before Souvaroff could come up, Masséna surprised him in his camp at Zurich, beat him, and broke up his troops, driving them with immense loss to the Rhine. The moving upon Souvaroff he defeated him as he had done his lieutenant. In these engagements 30,000 of the enemy were killed or taken, fifteen stand of colours and sixty guns captured, the independence of Switzerland confirmed, and France saved from invasion. Masséna's fame was never so high nor so honourable, and he and his army were thrice thanked by the Legislature.

Meanwhile the Government and the country, torn by factions, were throwing on each other the responsibility alike for internal disorder and reverses abroad. The Directory was tottering under the contempt of the public, and it was clear that things could not go on in the present fashion. Then came the 18th Brumaire, and Bonaparte as First Consul headed the new Government. Masséna, a nullity in politics, took no hand in this revolution, and had no great love for the new state of things, but accepted the command of the Army of Italy, which my father, as senior general of division, had held momentarily on the death of General Championnet. So careless had the Directory been that Masséna found his army in utter misery. I have already mentioned the efforts which he made to put the troops on a good footing in face of the destitution which then prevailed along the Genoese coast; and I need not tell that part of my story over again. I will merely say that by his courage, physical and moral, and his knowledge of the art of war, Masséna covered himself with glory. He again saved France from invasion, when by the obstinacy of his defence of Genoa, he allowed the First Consul time to concentrate at

Dijon the reserve army with which he crossed the Alps, and beat the Austrians at Marengo. After that victory, the command of the army was left in Masséna's hands, but the old complaints soon broke out again. Remonstrances were heard from all sides, requisitions were levied on various pretexts, and yet the troops were not paid. On hearing of the state of affairs, the First Consul suddenly, and without explanation, removed Masséna from the command. Returning then into private life, he showed his dissatisfaction by refusing to vote for Bonaparte's appointment as Consul for life, nor would he show himself at the new court. None the less the First Consul gave him a sword of honour, inscribed with all the victories in which he had borne a share. Also when he seized the imperial crown, he included Masséna in his first list of marshals, and named him Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour. On this Masséna's opposition ceased; he voted for the Empire, and attended the ceremonies of consecration and coronation at the Tuileries.

When France was in 1805 threatened for the third time by a coalition, the duty fell to Masséna of defending North Italy against the Archduke Charles. He not only saved Lombardy, but he attacked the enemy, and drove him beyond the Tagliamento; penetrating even to Carniola, where, by forcing the Archduke to halt, and face him every day, he delayed him till he was too late to save Vienna, or join the Russian army which was beaten at Austerlitz. The Emperor, however, did not seem to appreciate Masséna's services in this campaign very highly. He accused him of not acting with his wonted vigour—but this did not prevent him from being shortly sent to conquer the kingdom of Naples.

In a month the French had occupied the whole country, except the fortress of Gaeta, and this Masséna took after a vigorously sustained siege. During his attack on that town, he experienced a very keen annoyance, which he never got over. An immense sum which, he asserted, belonged to him, was confiscated by the Emperor. The story is curious enough to be worth telling.

Under the conviction that the best way to compel the

English to sue for peace was to destroy their commerce by forbidding the importation of their goods into the Continent, Napoleon used to have these goods seized and burnt in every country subject to his authority; that is, in more than half of Europe. But the love of gold is powerful, and trade is cunning; and thus a system of smuggling without risk had been devised. The method was that arrangements were made with English merchants under which they sent out vessels to be captured by our privateers, who brought them into some of the numerous ports between Pomerania and the Bay of Naples which were occupied by our troops. The next act was to unlade the packages and land them so as to escape confiscation; but this had already been provided for. The extent of coast line being too great to be watched throughout by regular preventive officers, the duty was done by soldiers under the orders of the general in command of the kingdom or province. An authorisation from one of these was sufficient to pass in the bales of goods, and after this the merchants dealt with the 'protector.' This was called a 'licence.'[1] This new style of trade began as early as 1806, when Bernadotte was occupying Hamburg and part of Denmark. That marshal acquired by this means considerable sums, and whenever he wished to testify his satisfaction with any person, he would grant him a licence, and the receiver would sell it to some merchant. This practice gradually extended, and even reached the Emperor's court, where chamberlains and ladies-in-waiting got the ministers to give them licences. It was kept from Napoleon's knowledge, but he found it out, or suspected it. In order, however, not to interfere too abruptly with the habits of the conquered countries, he tolerated the abuse outside France, provided that it was carried on with secrecy; but strange to say of so great a man, as soon as he learnt that anyone had carried his illicit games too far, he made him disgorge. Thus, on hearing that the commissary Michaux, head of the administrative department in Bernadotte's army, had lost 300,000 francs at

[1 Not quite the same, apparently, as the so-called 'system of licences' by which Napoleon modified his 'Continental system.']

one sitting in a gambling house at Paris, he ordered an aide-de-camp to write to him saying that the 'Invalides' was in want of cash, and bidding him pay up 300,000 francs. Michaux did so without loss of time, out of his profits on licences.

You may suppose that Masséna had not been behindhand in this business. In partnership with General Solignac, his chief of staff, he flooded every port in the kingdom of Naples with licences. The Emperor, hearing that he had deposited three millions with a banker at Leghorn, and General Solignac 600,000 at the same time, wrote to the marshal, asking for the loan of a million, and requesting 200,000 from the chief of the staff; just a third of the profits which each had made, so that as you see he did not shear them too close. But at sight of this new kind of draft, Masséna, shrieking as though his bowels were being torn out, replied to Napoleon that he was the poorest of the marshals, had a numerous family to maintain, and was over head and ears in debt; he regretted, therefore, that he could not send him anything. General Solignac made a similar answer, and both were congratulating themselves on having thus taken in the Emperor, when the son of the Leghorn banker arrived post-haste, announcing that the inspector of the French treasury had called on his father, escorted by the commissary of police and several gendarmes, ordered the cash book to be handed over to him, and given a receipt for the 3,600,000 francs paid in by the marshal and General Solignac, adding that this sum belonged to the army and had been entrusted on deposit to those two personages. The Emperor, he said, ordered it to be remitted at once, either in specie or negotiable bills, and the receipts given to Masséna and Solignac might be cancelled. The seizure had been made in due legal form, and the banker, who, indeed, lost nothing by it, was powerless to oppose it. It is difficult to conceive the fury of Masséna on hearing that his fortune had just been snatched away from him. He fell ill, but did not venture to address any remonstrance to the Emperor, who was at that time in Poland and summoned him thither. After the Peace of Tilsit the title of Duke of Rivoli

and a pension of 300,000 francs were the reward of his services, but they never consoled him for what he had lost at Leghorn. In spite of his cautious habits he was heard sometimes to cry: 'I was fighting in his service, and he was cruel enough to take away my little savings which I had invested at Leghorn.'[1]

I have already related the glorious part which the marshal took in the campaign of 1809. To reward his conduct at the battles of Essling and Wagram, the Emperor made him Prince of Essling with a further pension of 500,000 francs, in addition to the 300,000 which he had as Duke of Rivoli, and 200,000 as marshal and commander-in-chief. The new-made prince did not increase his expenditure by a halfpenny.

The campaigns in Spain and Portugal were Masséna's last, and as I have related, they were not fortunate. His mind was not what it was, so that these two campaigns added nothing to his glory, but rather diminished his reputation as a general, and the 'spoilt child of victory' experienced reverses when he might and ought to have been victorious.

Masséna was lean and spare, below the middle height; he had a highly expressive Italian face. The bad points in his character were want of candour, a tendency to bear malice, harshness, and avarice. He had much natural ability, but his adventurous youth and low origin never gave him a chance of studying, and he was totally lacking in what is called cultivation. He was a born general; his courage and tenacity did the rest. In the best days of his military career he saw accurately, decided promptly, and never let himself be cast down by reverses. As he grew old he pushed caution to the point of timidity, in fear of compromising the reputation he had earned. He hated reading, and thus had no knowledge of what had been written about war; it was an inspiration with him, and Napoleon judged him rightly when he said in his memoirs that when Masséna arrived on

[1] General Lamarque, in his memoirs, relates how he had the unpleasant task of announcing to Masséna that his millions were confiscated. The scene took place at night in the Palazzo Acton.

the field of battle he did not know what he should do, and circumstances decided him.

It is a mistake to represent Masséna, as some have done, as a stranger to flattery, speaking the truth to the Emperor, frankly, and even, indeed, a little brusquely. Under his rough hide Masséna was a cunning courtier. The following was a curious instance of this. One day the Emperor, accompanied by several marshals, among them Masséna, was shooting in the forest of Fontainebleau, and fired at a pheasant. The shot, badly aimed, went in Masséna's direction, and one pellet destroyed his left eye. No one but the Emperor had fired at the moment, and he was certainly the involuntary author of the accident; but Masséna, realising that his eye was gone and it would do him no good to call attention to the clumsiness which had been the cause of his wound, while the Emperor would be grateful to him for diverting attention from himself, attacked Prince Berthier, who had not yet fired, for his reckless shooting. Napoleon and all those present quite understood this courtier-like discretion, and every attention was paid to Masséna by his master.

With all his avarice, the conqueror of Zurich would have given half his fortune to have been born in France, and not on the left bank of the Var. He disliked nothing so much as the Italian termination of his name. He always wrote *e* for *a* in his signature, and when he spoke to his eldest son called him Massène. But the public never accepted the change, and in spite of him who had made it famous the name of Masséna prevailed.

The campaign in Portugal affected Masséna's health so much that he was obliged to rest and recruit at Nice. He passed the whole of 1812 there, but when Napoleon, on his return from Russia, found it necessary to use all his resources, considering that Masséna's name might yet be of service, he employed him as governor of the 8th military division. When the allies invaded France in 1814, Masséna, who had, indeed, few troops at his disposal, did nothing to check their advance. On April 15 he made his submission to the Duke of Angoulême, who created him commander of the order of St. Louis,

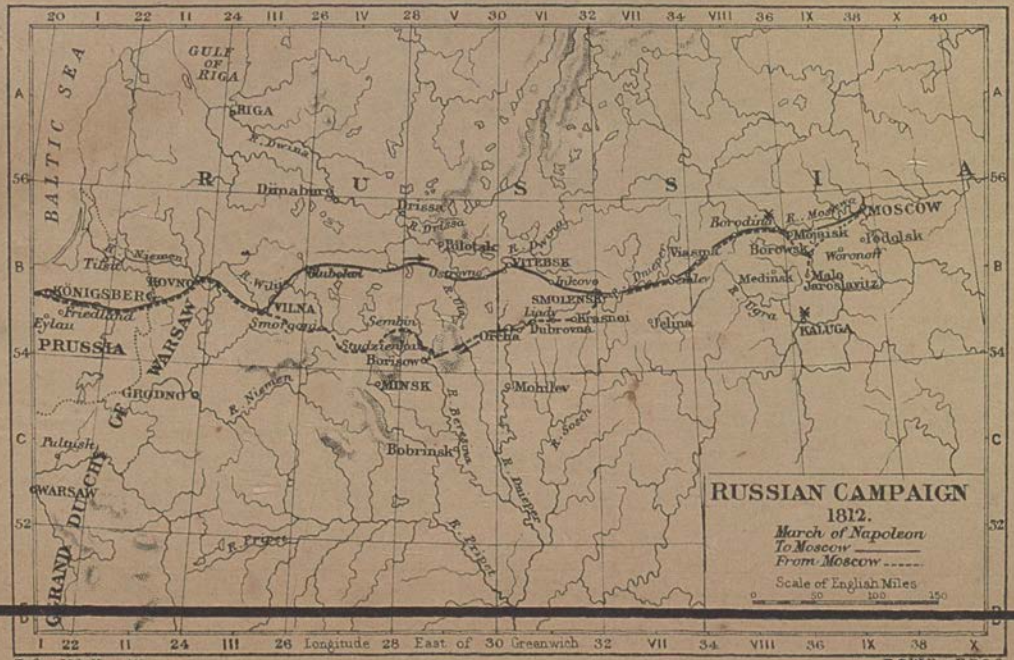
but did not make him a peer of France, on the plea that he was born a foreigner and had not been naturalised, as if the victories of Rivoli and Zurich, the defence of Genoa, and a whole list of glorious battles in the cause of France were not as valid as any papers of naturalisation. The affront thus done to Masséna produced a very bad effect on public opinion and that of the army, and had as much to do as anything with the natural irritation against Louis XVIII.'s Government and the consequent return of the Emperor. When he landed on March 1, 1815, and marched towards Paris at the head of a thousand grenadiers, Masséna was taken by surprise and much perplexed by the unforeseen event. He tried to stem the torrent by collecting some regiments of the line, and calling out the National Guard of Marseilles; but on learning that the Duke of Angoulême had been forced to capitulate at La Palud, Masséna sent his son to Louis XVIII. to let him know that he must not count on him any longer. Rallying to the Imperial Government, he hoisted the tricolor flag on April 10 throughout his division, and locked up the Prefect of the Var, who was still for holding out. By this conduct Masséna satisfied neither side; the Emperor summoned him to Paris, and gave him a pretty cold reception.

When Napoleon committed the immense blunder of abdicating a second time in consequence of the battle of Waterloo, the chamber of representatives, which he had made the mistake of summoning before joining the army, seized the power and named a provisional government. Its first act was to assign to Masséna the command of the National Guard of Paris. He was too infirm to be able to perform the duties in person, but they wished to have a name which might stimulate the civil inhabitants and induce them to aid the army in the defence of the capital. Fouché's intrigues sowed discord among the members of the provisional government, and the plans of defence having been submitted to a military committee Masséna gave the opinion that Paris could not resist. Consequently an armistice was concluded, and the French army retired behind the Loire and was then

disbanded. To punish Masséna for having deserted his cause, Louis XVIII. included him among Marshal Ney's judges, in the hope that, under the influence of personal dislike, he would condemn his unhappy colleague and thus stain his own illustrious name. He attempted, however, to decline, giving as a reason the disagreement which had existed between himself and Ney in Portugal. When this plea was rejected he joined that portion of the court which voted for sending Ney before the chamber of peers. They hoped thus to save him; but they would have done better if they had had the courage to try him themselves and acquit him. When Ney had been condemned by the peers and shot, so far from appeasing the rage of the royalist faction, his blood made them implacable, and they soon began to persecute Masséna himself. The people of Marseilles, whose benefactor he had been, denounced him before the Chamber of Deputies for peculation. There was no ground for the accusation, for he had been guilty of no exactions in Provence, and so the majority of the 'ideal' chamber, celebrated as it was for its hatred towards the famous men of the Empire, rejected the petition of the Marseilles people with contempt. It was at this sitting that Manuel, since become famous, first came into notice by his warm defence of Masséna. From that time onwards the marshal lived in retirement at his château of Rueil, and ended his glorious career in misfortune and solitude on April 4, 1817. He was fifty-nine years old.

When he died he had not yet received from the Government his new marshal's baton, and, as it is the custom to place this on a marshal's coffin, his son-in-law, General Reille, requested Clarke, Duke of Feltre, the Minister of War, to forward it. But Clarke had become a furious legitimist, and made no reply to this fair request. Then General Reille let the court know that if the marshal's baton was not sent for his father-in-law's funeral, he would place conspicuously on the coffin the one which the Emperor had given him in former days, whereupon the Government agreed to send the emblem.

I have noted many blemishes in the life of this famous warrior, but they are covered by his renown and his signal services to France, and Masséna's memory will go down to posterity as that of one of the greatest captains of an age so fertile in illustrious soldiers.



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F. S. Weller, F.R.G.S.

CHAPTER XX

I BEGAN the year 1812 at Paris with my wife and our respective families; but my happiness was disturbed by the thought of my approaching departure to join the first regiment of chasseurs, to which I had been appointed as major only. My regret at not having obtained promotion to colonel was somewhat lessened when I was paying my respects on New Year's Day at the Tuileries, and the Emperor sent for me to his private room. I found there the Count of Lobau, who, in this matter, as always, did me much kindness. Napoleon appeared, and was very affable, saying that he had intended to give me a regiment, that personal considerations had induced him to make Barain a colonel, which with Pelet and Casabianca made three colonels from Masséna's staff, and he did not think he ought to appoint a fourth. He added that, though he could not give me the nominal command of a regiment, he was going to give it me practically—that, namely, of the 23rd Mounted Chasseurs. The colonel, M. de la Nougarède, suffered so much from gout that he could scarcely ride. 'But,' continued the Emperor, 'he is an excellent officer, and served his first campaigns valiantly with me; I have much liking and esteem for him, and as he has begged me to allow him to try another campaign, I do not wish to take his regiment from him. However, I understand that that fine regiment is in a somewhat ticklish state, so I am sending you as his coadjutor. You will be working in your own interest—for if the colonel's health improves I shall make him a general. Otherwise I shall put him in the gendarmerie, and in either case you will be colonel. So I repeat that you will be working in your own interest.' This promise restored my hopes, and I was making ready to start

for my new destination when my leave was prolonged till the end of March, a favour that was none the less agreeable because I had not asked for it.

The 23rd Chasseurs was then in Swedish Pomerania, and, wishing to join before the end of my leave, I left Paris on March 15. I gave a place in my carriage to M. Durbach, nephew of Marshal Mortier, a lieutenant in the same regiment. My old servant, Woirland, had asked leave to stay in Spain, hoping to make his fortune in a canteen, and I had replaced him when I left Salamanca by a Pole named Lorenz Schilkowski. He had been an Austrian uhlan and was not lacking in wits, but was a drunkard like all the Poles, and, unlike the soldiers of that nation, as cowardly as a hare. But, besides his native tongue, Lorenz spoke French a little, German and Russian perfectly, and in these respects was exceedingly valuable to me for a war in the north.

As we were starting at night from the post-house of Kaiserslantern, the postilion upset my carriage into a quagmire and it was broken. Nobody was hurt, but M. Durbach and I both said: 'A bad omen for soldiers who will soon be in presence of the enemy.' However, after a day spent in repairing damages, we were able to proceed, but the springs and wheels were so much injured that they broke six times during the journey, causing us much delay, and making us do several leagues on foot in the snow. At length we reached the shores of the Baltic, and found the 23rd Chasseurs in garrison at Stralsund and Greifswald.

I found Colonel de la Nougarède an excellent man, cultivated and capable, but so prematurely aged by gout that he had to travel constantly in a carriage—a melancholy way for the commander of a light cavalry regiment to move. He received me most kindly, and after explaining to me his reasons for remaining with the regiment, he showed me a letter in which the Count of Lobau informed him of the reasons which led the Emperor to place me with him. So far from being hurt by this, he regarded it as an additional kindness on the Emperor's part, and as holding out hopes that he would soon be appointed general, or commander of

gendarmerie. He expected, with my help, to be able at least to take some part in the campaign, and obtain what he desired at the first review held by the Emperor. Therefore, to associate me in the command more than my position as senior major would naturally imply, he assembled the officers, and in their presence delegated his powers provisionally to me, bidding each obey me without reference to him, since his weak health often made it impossible for him to keep sufficiently near the regiment for him to command it in person. A general order to this effect was drawn up, and from that day I became in everything but rank a regimental commander, and the regiment soon became accustomed to regard me as its actual commander. Since that time I have commanded army cavalry regiments, either as colonel or as a general officer, and I have been for a long time inspector of that arm; but I can safely say that, if I ever saw a regiment in as good condition as the 23rd Chasseurs, I never saw a better. It was not that it contained men of surpassing merit, such as I have occasionally known in other regiments, but if there was no man in the 23rd of extraordinary ability, there was not one who was not thoroughly up to his duty. All were on the same level of courage and zeal: there was no weak spot. The officers, highly intelligent and sufficiently well trained, were all of excellent character, and lived together as true brethren in arms. It was the same with the non-commissioned officers, and the troopers followed their good example. Nearly all were veterans of Austerlitz, Jena, Friedland, and Wagram, and most had three, or at least two, good-conduct stripes; those who had only one were a small minority. They were a splendid lot of men, from Normandy, Alsace, Lorraine, and Franche-Comté, provinces well known for military spirit and love of horses. General Bourcier, when charged with the general remounting, had been so struck with the stature of the men that he had given them larger and stouter horses than the chasseurs usually have, so that this regiment was called the carbiniers of the light cavalry. Their long stay in Germany had brought men and horses into perfect condition; and when I took the command

of the regiment it had an effective strength of over 1,000 fighting men, well-disciplined, calm, and able to hold their tongues, especially in presence of the enemy.

I got my horses from the island of Rügen, where there is a good breed, and from Rosbock, seven in all. This was none too many, for war with Russia was clearly imminent. I had foreseen it since the summer of 1811, when I noticed how the Emperor was withdrawing men from the Peninsula to reinforce his Guard, and while staying in Paris my convictions of it had been strengthened. Rumours of strained relations—vanishing during the diversions of the winter, but always reviving in a more definite form—finally grew stronger, till they reached almost the point of certainty in consequence of a serious occurrence, which, as it was discussed throughout Europe, I ought to relate here.

The Emperor Alexander had been brought up with a young Russian noble called Czernicheff, whom, when he came to the throne, he had appointed his aide-de-camp. In 1809, when Alexander, as Napoleon's ally, was pretending to be at war with Austria, we saw Colonel Czernicheff arrive at Vienna, ostensibly charged with maintaining good relations between Napoleon and Alexander; but with the secret duty of keeping his sovereign informed of our successes and reverses, so that he might maintain or dissolve his alliance with France, as circumstances indicated. Alexander's favourite was kindly received by Napoleon, and was always by his side during the period preceding the battle of Essling, but when the result of that sanguinary action appeared doubtful, and cannon-balls began to drop among the imperial staff, M. de Czernicheff rode off out of the way of danger, and two days after the battle started for St. Petersburg, no doubt to relate the failure of our attempt. Napoleon regarded his conduct as very unseemly, and let fall sharp gibes upon the courage of the Russian colonel. After the peace, however, Czernicheff came often to Paris, and, being handsome, amiable, and exquisitely polite, was well received, not only at court but also in the drawing-rooms of the best society. He never talked politics, and had the reputation of being much

in favour with ladies. Towards the end of 1811, however, when the rumours of war revived, the police had information that the Russian colonel, while feigning to be devoted to pleasure, was concerned in suspicious dealings connected with politics. He was carefully watched, and it soon became known that he had frequent interviews with M. X——, an official in the War Office, whose special duty it was to draw up the 'states' presented every ten days to the Emperor, showing the strength and condition of every arm in the service. Not only was Czernicheff recognised when walking after midnight in the darkest parts of the Champs Elysées with the French official, but he was often seen to enter X——'s lodgings dressed in shabby clothes, and stay there several hours. This intimacy on the part of a person of high rank with a poor War Office clerk was clear proof that the latter was in the pay of the former for the betrayal of state secrets, and the Emperor gave orders to arrest M. de Czernicheff. He was, however, warned, it is said by a woman, and leaving Paris at once travelled by the least-frequented roads, and reached the Rhine frontier, avoiding Mainz and Cologne, whither orders for his seizure had been telegraphed. As for the poor clerk, he was arrested at the very moment when he was counting a sum of 300,000 francs in bank notes, the price of his treason. Compelled by the evidence to admit his crime, he stated that another War Office clerk had sold documents to the Russian colonel. He, too, was arrested, and both were tried, condemned, and shot. They died cursing Czernicheff, who, they said, had sought them out in their garrets and seduced them by the sight of a heap of gold which he kept increasing as long as they had any hesitation. The Emperor caused a virulent article against M. de Czernicheff to be published in all the French papers, adding remarks which, indirect as they were, must have deeply wounded the Russian Emperor, for they recalled the fact that Alexander had never punished the murderers of his father Paul.

After this there could be no further question about war, and although it was not yet declared, open preparations for it were made on both sides. Czernicheff's conduct, although

blamed in words by everybody, yet found specially among diplomatists some who approved it in secret, on the strength of the famous adage: *Salus patriae prima lex.* On this point too, they recalled a little-known anecdote which I had from Marshal Lannes, proving that while Napoleon punished, and rightly, Frenchmen who sold their country's secrets to the enemy, he was accustomed to corrupt foreign officials who could furnish him with information likely to be useful in war. The story, as Lannes told it me at Vienna in 1809, was as follows.

When hostilities between France and Austria were on the point of breaking out, the Archduke Charles was anonymously informed that a certain general, whom he valued highly and had just appointed deputy-chief of his staff, had sold himself to General Andréossi, the French ambassador, and had frequent interviews with him at night in an empty house in the Leopoldstadt, the number of which was given. So high was the Archduke's esteem for the general, that he treated the accusation, brought by a person who dared not name himself, as a foul calumny, and took no steps to verify it. Just when the French ambassador, having asked for his passports, was about to leave Vienna within forty-eight hours, a second anonymous letter came, informing the Archduke that his deputy-chief of the staff, after working alone in his room, where the 'states' of the army were kept, was to have that night a final meeting with General Andréossi. Wishing to put out of his mind any suspicion which he feared might linger against an officer whom he liked, the Archduke resolved to establish his innocence for himself. Dressing, therefore, in ordinary civil clothes, and accompanied only by his senior aide-de-camp, he took his stand after midnight in the darkest part of the side-street where the house in question stood. After a few moments' waiting, they saw a man, in whom, though disguised, they were grieved to recognise the deputy-chief of the staff. At a signal from him, the door was opened; and a few seconds later, General Andréossi entered in the same manner. The interview lasted some hours, during which the disgusted Archduke, who could no longer doubt as to the treason of his subordinate, waited patiently before the

house. At length the door opened, and General Andréossi came out with the Austrian general, meeting the Archduke full in face. He said aloud, 'Good evening, Mr. French Ambassador,' then disdaining to address any words of reproach to his deputy-chief of the staff, he merely turned a dark lantern on to him. But the aide-de-camp, less cautious, tapped the wretch on the shoulder, observing: 'Look at that infamous traitor, General So-and-so, who will be degraded to-morrow!' The ambassador slunk away without a word. As for the Austrian general, caught *in flagranti delicto*, and knowing what he had to expect, he went home and blew his brains out. The tragedy was studiously hushed up by the Austrian Government, and made little noise; it was given out that the deputy-chief of the staff had died from a sudden apoplectic seizure. He appears to have received two millions from the French ambassador.

One curious feature about Colonel Czernicheff's business was, that at the moment when Napoleon was complaining of the means employed by him to obtain the 'states' of our armies, General Lauriston, our ambassador at St. Petersburg, was buying, not only the most accurate information about the position and strength of the Russian army, but also the engraved copperplates from which the great map of the Russian Empire had been printed. In spite of the vast difficulties in the transport of this heavy mass of metal, the treason was so well arranged, and so handsomely paid for, that these plates were abstracted from the archives of the Russian Government and carried into France without their disappearance being discovered, either by the police or by the customs officials. As soon as the plates reached Paris, the War Office, after substituting French for Russian characters in the names of places and rivers, had this fine map printed, and the Emperor ordered a copy to be sent to all the generals and commanders of light cavalry regiments. Thus I received one, which I succeeded, with some difficulty, in saving during the retreat, as it forms a large roll. The map contained all Russia; even Siberia and Kamschatka, which considerably amused those who received it. Very few brought theirs back, but I have got mine.

CHAPTER XXI

THE Emperor's most powerful motive for war with Russia was his wish to compel her to carry out the treaty signed at Tilsit in 1807. By this the Emperor Alexander had undertaken to close all his ports to England; but this had never been carried out otherwise than very imperfectly. Napoleon rightly thought that he could ruin the English, an essentially manufacturing and trading people, if he could succeed in destroying their commerce with the continent; but the execution of this gigantic scheme involved such difficulties that only France proper was really subject to the commercial restrictions, and even there, the licences of which I have already spoken broke into them considerably. As for Italy, Germany, and the Illyrian provinces, the application of the continental system, though established by imperial decree, was quite illusory, both from the extent of the coast line and by the connivance and defective vigilance of those who administered the districts. Thus the Emperor of Russia, when summoned by France to forbid all commercial relations with England, replied by pointing to the exceptions which had become almost the rule throughout Europe. But the real reason for Alexander's refusal to comply with Napoleon's claims was his fear of being assassinated like the Emperor Paul, his father, the cause of complaint against whom was that he had wounded the national self-esteem by his alliance with France, and destroyed Russian commerce by going to war with England. Now Alexander began to see that by showing deference and friendship to Napoleon at Erfurt and Tilsit he had already alienated people's minds, and he had now to fear that by suspending all trade with England, the only outlet which the Russian nobility had for the produce of their

vast estates, he would supply them with a fresh ground of complaint. The death of Paul I. had shown the danger to which an Emperor of Russia exposed himself by taking such a step, and Alexander had all the more reason to fear, that he saw about him the same officers who had been about his father, among them Benningsen, his chief of staff.

Napoleon, when threatening Alexander with war if he did not accede to his wishes, hardly took into account the difficulties of his position. However, when he learnt the reverses which he had undergone in Spain and Portugal, he seemed to hesitate about engaging in a war of which the result seemed very uncertain. General Bertrand told me how Napoleon often repeated at St. Helena that at first his only idea was to frighten the Emperor Alexander into carrying out the treaty. 'We were,' he would say, 'like two equally good fencers, who seem ready to try conclusions, but neither one nor the other quite liking it. They advance by small steps, threatening with eye and with blade, each hoping that fear of crossing swords will make his enemy give way.'

But the Emperor's comparison was not exact; for one of the fencers had behind him a bottomless abyss ready to engulf him if he took a step backwards; and thus placed between an ignominious death and the necessity of fighting with some chance of success, he was bound to take the latter course. Such was the situation of Alexander, made still worse by the intrigues of the Englishman, Wilson, with General Benningsen and the officers of his staff.

Still Napoleon hesitated, and seemed willing to listen to the prudent counsels of Caulaincourt, formerly ambassador at St. Petersburg. He questioned French officers who had lived in Russia, and knew the country and its resources. Among them was Lieutenant-Colonel de Ponthon, one of the engineer officers whom Napoleon had, at Alexander's request, authorized, and even asked, to enter the Russian service after the Peace of Tilsit. He was an able and very modest man, and did not give his opinion until the Emperor questioned him; then, like an honourable man devoted to

his country, he felt bound to speak the whole truth, and, without fear of displeasing the head of the state, he pointed out all the obstacles in the way of his enterprise. The chief of these were, the apathy of the Lithuanian provinces, and the unlikelihood of their offering any support; the fanatical resistance of the Russians proper; the scarcity of provisions and forage, the need of crossing almost desert regions, the impracticability of the roads for artillery after some hours' rain; but, above all, he insisted on the rigour of the winter, and the physical impossibility of fighting after the snow fell, which it usually did in the early days of October. Finally, with real courage, because he was running the risk of giving displeasure and compromising his own career, M. de Ponthon went so far as to fall at the Emperor's knees and entreat him in the name of the fortunes of France and his own glory, not to undertake this dangerous expedition, all the disasters of which he predicted. The Emperor heard him calmly, and took leave of him without remark. For several days he was pensive, and the rumour got about that the expedition was postponed. But very soon the Duke of Bassano brought the Emperor back to his original plan, and it was said that Marshal Davout was no stranger to Napoleon's resolution of moving the army of Germany to the banks of the Niemen. From that moment, although M. de Ponthon remained in the Emperor's immediate service and went everywhere with him, Napoleon never spoke to him again during the whole march to Moscow, and when on the retreat he was forced to admit that that excellent officer's prevision had been only too completely verified, he avoided meeting him. Nevertheless, he promoted him to full colonel.

Let us, however, not anticipate events, and let us return to the preparations which Napoleon was making to persuade or coerce Russia into accepting his conditions. In April the French troops in Germany and those of the allied princes of the Germanic confederation were set in motion, and their march towards Poland was delayed only by the difficulty of procuring forage. Meanwhile the Emperor left Paris on May 9, and, with the Empress, betook himself to Dresden. He was

awaited there by his father-in-law, the Emperor of Austria, and nearly all the German princes, some drawn by the hope of seeing their States extended, others by fear of displeasing the arbiter of their destiny. The only king absent was the King of Prussia. Not belonging to the Confederation of the Rhine, he had not been summoned to the meeting, and dared not present himself without Napoleon's leave. For this he humbly begged, and when he had obtained it, hastened to make another among the crowd of sovereigns who had repaired to Dresden to pay their court to the all-powerful conqueror of Europe.

The protestations of fidelity and devotion which were there lavished on Napoleon dazzled him till they made him commit a most serious mistake in the organisation of the contingents which were to compose the Grand Army. Instead of weakening the Governments of Austria and Prussia, his former foes, by requiring them to contribute the larger part of their available troops, whom prudence would have enjoined him to place in the advanced guard, as much to spare French blood as to enable him to keep an eye on his new and wavering allies, Napoleon not only contented himself with taking 30,000 men from each of these Powers, but employed them on the wings of his army. The Austrians, under Prince Schwarzenberg, were on the right, in Volhynia; the Prussians, whom he placed under a French marshal, Macdonald, formed the left; the centre was composed of French troops and the contingents from the Confederation of the Rhine. The faults of this organisation struck many intelligent men, who were sorry to see the wings of the Grand Army composed of foreigners, who, placed on the frontiers of their own countries, were in a position to form, in case of a reverse, two armies in our rear, while our centre, consisting of trustworthy troops, would be deep within the Russian Empire. Austria was retaining 120,000 soldiers ready to act against us in case of our failure, Prussia had 60,000 men over and above her contingent. It is astonishing that the Emperor took so little heed of what he was leaving behind him, but so confident was he that, when the King of Prussia begged him to allow

his eldest son (the present King [1]) to go with him as aide-de-camp, Napoleon, although the young prince would have been a valuable hostage for the loyalty of his father, would not consent. It was a remarkable fact that, while the Austrian generals expressed their satisfaction at the union of their flag with ours, the inferior officers and the men regretted having to march against Russia. In the Prussian contingent it was just the contrary. The generals and colonels felt humiliated at being obliged to serve their conqueror, while the junior officers and the soldiers rejoiced at the opportunity of fighting beside the French, to show that, if they had been beaten in the Vienna campaign, it was not for want of courage but because they had been badly led.

Besides enclosing the Grand Army between Austrian and Prussian contingents, Napoleon had lowered the tone of the French troops by mingling foreign regiments with them. Thus the first corps commanded by Marshal Davout reckoned on June 1st 67,000 men, of whom 58,000 were French, the balance consisting of Germans, Spaniards, and Poles. In the second corps under Oudinot, with 34,000 French, there were 1,600 Portuguese, 1,800 Croats, and 7,000 Swiss. In Ney's corps, the third, the proportion of French was even smaller, while in the fourth and sixth corps, united under Eugène Beauharnais, the French composed less than one-half, the remainder being Croats, Bavarians, Spaniards, Dalmatians, and Italians, and of the 44,000 cavalry under Murat 27,000 only were French. It is not my intention here to name all the forces at Napoleon's disposal when he entered Russia, but I wished to show to what extent the French element was mingled with foreigners, who were themselves in the most heterogeneous confusion with regard to language, manners, customs, and interest; all served very badly, and often paralysed the efforts of the French troops. This was one of the principal causes of the reverses which we underwent.

Leaving Dresden on July 29,[2] the Emperor went towards Poland, by way of Dantzig and Prussia Pr[illegible]

[1] Frederick William IV., King of Prussia, 1840–60.

[2] So in the original, but July is obviously an error for May.]

His troops were crossing this country at the same time, and he reviewed them as he came up with them. The 23rd Mounted Chasseurs was brigaded with the 24th. This brigade, commanded by General Castex, formed part of the 2nd army corps, under Marshal Oudinot. I had known General Castex for some time; he was an excellent man, and I got on perfectly with him throughout the campaign. Marshal Oudinot had seen me at the siege of Genoa, as well as in Austria, in 1809, and he treated me with much kindness. On June 20 the 2nd corps was ordered to halt at Insterburg, to be reviewed by the Emperor. These military solemnities were always awaited with impatience by those persons who hoped to share in the favours which Napoleon distributed on such occasions. I was of the number, believing myself all the more certain to be appointed colonel of the regiment that, besides the promises which the Emperor had made to me, General Castex and Marshal Oudinot had told me that they were going to recommend me officially, and that they believed that M. de la Nougarède was going to be placed, with the rank of general, at the head of one of the grand re-mount depôts which would be established in rear of the army. But the same fatality which had so frequently postponed the delivery of my commission as major pursued me afresh in obtaining that of colonel. The reviews involved severe examinations by the Emperor of the regimental commanders, especially on the eve of a campaign. Besides the usual questions as to the numerical strength in men and horses, he used to address a heap of unexpected queries which people were not always prepared to answer. For instance, 'How many men have you had from such a department in the last two years? How many carbines from Tulle or from Charleville? How many Norman horses have you? How many Breton? How many German? How many men of that troop have got three stripes? How many two, or one? What is the average age of your soldiers? Of your officers? Of your horses?' and so on. These questions, always put in a short, imperative tone, accompanied with a piercing glance,

put many colonels out of countenance; and yet woe to him who hesitated to answer: he got a bad mark in Napoleon's mind. I had prepared myself so well that I had an answer for everything, and the Emperor, after complimenting me on the fine condition of the regiment, would probably have named me colonel, and promoted M. de la Nougarède general. But just then the latter, with his legs wrapped in flannel, had got hoisted on his horse, to follow the movements of his regiment at a distance, while I commanded in his place. Hearing his name, came up to Napoleon and irritated him by an untimely request on behalf of an officer, a relation of his, who was unworthy of any interest. This request raised a storm of which I experienced the recoil. Napoleon flew into a violent rage, ordered the gendarmes to expel the officer in question from the army, and galloped away, leaving La Nougarède confounded; so he was not made general. Marshal Oudinot having followed the Emperor to inquire his orders with regard to the 23rd Chasseurs, his Majesty replied, 'Let Major Marbot continue to command it.' Before I obtained colonel's rank I was to be wounded again, and that severely.

To do M. de la Nougarède justice, I must say that he expressed in the frankest manner his regret at having been the involuntary cause of the delay in my promotion. I was much concerned by the worthy man's awkward position; he feared that he had lost the Emperor's confidence, and at the same time his infirmity prevented him from recovering it by good conduct in battle.

I had been fortunate enough on the review day to obtain all the promotions and decorations which I had asked for on behalf of my officers and men; and, as the gratitude for these favours always falls upon the commander who has secured them, my influence in the regiment increased considerably, and mitigated my regret at not having been promoted to the rank of which I was discharging the functions. At this time I received letters from Marshal Masséna and the Maréchale, the former commending to me M. Renique, the latter her son Prosper. I was touched by this attention,

and accepted both as captains in my regiment; but Prosper Masséna never came to Russia; nor could he, indeed, have borne the climate.

We were now close upon the Russian frontier, and once more about to see the Niemen, which had been our limit in 1807. The army was arranged in the following order. The Austrians, under Schwarzenburg, on the extreme right; to his left between Bielostock and Grodno, two army corps under King Jerome, and next to them Eugène Beauharnais; the centre faced Kowno, consisting of 220,000 combatants, under Murat, Ney, Oudinot, Lefebvre, and Bessières; the Emperor being with it in person. Macdonald, with 35,000 Prussians, formed, as I have said, the left wing at Tilsit. Behind the Niemen was the Russian army, 400,000 strong, commanded by the Emperor Alexander, or rather by Benningsen. It was divided into three principal corps under Bagration, Barclay de Tolly, and Wittgenstein.

Four historians have written on the campaign of 1812. The first was Labaume, a mapping engineer—a member, that is, of a corps which, although part of the military establishment, never went into action, and only accompanied the army for surveying purposes. He never commanded troops, and had no practical knowledge of the art of war. His judgments are, therefore, usually incorrect, even when not unjust to the French army. As, however, Labaume's work appeared soon after the restoration of Louis XVIII., party spirit, as well as the desire for information about the terrible events of the Russian campaign, gave it some celebrity, increased by the fact that no one took the trouble to refute it, and thus the public got into the way of regarding its accuracy as unquestioned.

The second narrative is that of Colonel Boutourlin, aide-de-camp to the Emperor Alexander. This work, although written by an enemy, contains much sensible criticism, and if the author is not always strictly accurate it is for want of documents, for he has impartially done all that was in his power to discover the truth, and is in general esteem as having written like an honourable man.

Labaume's libellous work was already forgotten when General the Count de Ségur published, in 1825, a third history of the campaign of 1812. More than one survivor of that campaign was distressed by the spirit of the work, and even our enemies called it a military romance. It had nevertheless a great success, both from the purity and elegance of its style, and on account of the reception which it had from the court and the ultra-royalist party. The old officers of the Empire, feeling that they were attacked, charged General Gourgaud to reply. He did it successfully, but in too bitter a fashion, and a duel resulted between him and M. de Ségur, who was wounded. It must be owned that if the latter shows little favour to Napoleon and his army, General Gourgaud is too flattering, for he will see none of the Emperor's mistakes. I certainly have no intention of writing the history afresh, but I think I ought to record the principal facts, since they form an essential part of the period in which I have lived, and in many cases are connected with my fortunes. I wish, however, in this brief summary to avoid the contrary extremes into which Ségur and Gourgaud fell. I will neither detract nor flatter: I will tell the truth.

At the moment when the two mighty empires were about to clash together, England, Russia's natural ally, was bound to make every effort to assist her to repel invasion. By lavishing gold[1] on the Turkish Ministers the English Cabinet succeeded in establishing peace between Russia and the Porte, thus enabling the former to call home her army, then on the frontier of Turkey, which army played an important part in the war. England had also arranged a peace between the Emperor Alexander and France's natural ally, Sweden, on whom Napoléon had all the more right to count, since Bernadotte had just been appointed Crown Prince, and was governing the country in the name of the old King, his adoptive father. I have already told you[2] the curious

[1 This, of course, is 'common form.' English gold had less to do with the Treaty of Bucharest than the energy and ability of young Mr. Stratford Canning, and the English Cabinet took very little hand in it.]

[2 Vol. i. p. 238.]

concourse of circumstances by which Bernadotte had been raised to the position of heir-presumptive to the Swedish crown. After all his assurances that he would remain a Frenchman at heart, the new prince let himself be inveigled or intimidated by the English, who could, indeed, easily have overthrown him. He sacrificed the true interests of his new country when he let himself be swayed by England and allied himself with Russia, as he did in a meeting with the Emperor Alexander at the Finnish town of Abo. The Russians had just conquered that province, and promised to indemnify Sweden by the cession of Norway, which was to be torn from Denmark, the too faithful ally of France. Thus Bernadotte, instead of relying on our army to get back his provinces, sanctioned these encroachments by placing himself among the allies of Russia. If he would have acted with us the geographical position of Sweden would have served our common interests admirably.

So far, however, the new Crown Prince did not definitely take sides against us; he waited till he could judge the chances of victory, and did not declare himself till the next year. Deprived of support from Turkey and Sweden, Napoleon's only available allies towards the north were the Poles: a turbulent race, whose forefathers, when they formed an independent state, could not agree, and from whom no moral or physical support could be hoped for. Indeed, Lithuania and the other provinces of the former Poland had in their forty years' subjection to Russia almost wholly lost the remembrance of their ancient constitution, and regarded themselves as Russians of old standing. The sons of the nobles, accustomed to enter the Czar's armies, were not likely to attach themselves to the French. With regard to those Poles who were subject to Austria and Prussia, they marched against Russia, but only under the flag of their present sovereigns, with no enthusiasm for Napoleon. The grand duchy of Warsaw, added to Saxony by the Treaty of Tilsit, alone retained a trace of national feeling and attached itself to France; but what could so small a state do? Still Napoleon, confident alike in his might and in his genius,

resolved to cross the Niemen. On June 23, wearing the cap and cloak of a Pole in his gurad, he examined the banks; and that evening at 10 P.M. ordered the passage to begin. Three bridges of boats had been thrown across opposite Kowno, and our troops occupied that town without resistance.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN the sun rose on June 24 we witnessed a most imposing spectacle. On the highest point near the left bank were seen the Emperor's tents. Around them, the slopes of every hill and the valleys between were gay with men and horses flashing with arms. This mass of 250,000 combatants was rolling on in three huge columns with the most perfect regularity towards the three bridges which crossed the river, and over which the various corps were proceeding to the right bank, each to advance in the direction prescribed to it. On the same day our troops crossed the Niemen at other points, near Grodno, Pilony, and Tilsit.

From a 'state' furnished to me by General Gourgaud, and scored all over with notes in Napoleon's hand, it appears that the army which crossed the Niemen amounted to 325,000 men actually present, of whom 155,000 were French; and 984 guns. The 2nd corps, of which my regiment formed part, crossed by the first bridge on June 23, and marched direct for Janowo. It was intensely hot, and towards night a heavy storm came on, with floods of rain. The army did not, however, as has been stated, regard this as a bad omen; soldiers are well used to hail and thunder in summer time. Moreover, the Russians had also their bad omen, for on the same night the Emperor Alexander nearly lost his life during a ball at Wilna, by the floor of a room giving way under his chair, just at the time when the first French detachment was landing on Russian soil. However, the storm made the weather very cold, and our horses, who had to eat wet grass and sleep on muddy ground, suffered a good deal. We also lost some thousands of men from acute colic.

Beyond Kowno flows a small stream called the Wilia, the

bridge over which had been cut by the enemy; and the storm having swollen it, Oudinot's leading scouts were stopped. The Emperor came up just as I reached the spot with my regiment. He ordered the Polish lancers to sound the ford, and one man was drowned. I took down his name, which was Tzinski. If I emphasise this detail it is because the accident to the Polish lancer at the passage of the Wilia has been vastly exaggerated.[1]

Meanwhile the Russians were retiring, and the French army soon occupied Wilna, the capital of Lithuania. Near this town a cavalry action took place, in which Octave de Ségur, elder brother of the general and historian, was captured when leading a squadron of the 8th Hussars. On the day when the Emperor entered Wilna, Marshal Ouidnot's troops encountered the Russian corps under Wittgenstein at Wilkomir, and the first serious engagement of the campaign took place. I had never served under Oudinot, and this beginning confirmed my high opinion of his courage, but still further reduced that which I held of his military talents.

One of the chief faults of the French in time of war is to pass without reason from the most minute caution to unbounded confidence. Thus the Russians having let us cross the Niemen and occupy Wilna unopposed, it became the thing among some officers to say that the enemy would always run away, and nowhere make a stand. Oudinot's staff, and the marshal himself, often vented this opinion, and treated the reports of the peasants as to a great Russian force posted before the little town of Wilkomir as fables. This incredulity was very near being the ruin of us, in this wise. Light cavalry, being the eyes of an army, usually marches in front and on the flank. My regiment then was a short league in advance of the infantry divisions, when, on getting near Wilkomir, without having seen a single enemy's picket I found myself in front of a forest of mighty pines, among which cavalry could easily move in sections, while the branches masked all distant view. Fearing an ambush, I

[1 E.g. Scott (who follows Ségur), *Life of Napoleon*, chap. lvii.]

halted the regiment, and sent a single squadron forward to reconnoitre. In a quarter of an hour the captain in command, a very intelligent man, returned with the news that the enemy was present in force. Hastening to the extreme edge of the forest, I saw, a cannon-shot away, the town of Wilkomir, covered by a stream and a hill upon which were drawn up in line 25,000 to 30,000 infantry, with cavalry and artillery. It may seem strange that these troops had thrown out neither grand guards, nor pickets, nor scouts; but when the Russians mean to defend a strong position their way is to let the enemy approach as near as possible without any warning from the fire of skirmishers of the resistance with which he is to meet; and not till his masses are within easy range do they open with artillery and musketry, so as to bewilder and throw into confusion the enemy's soldiers. This plan, which perhaps offers advantages, has often resulted well for the Russians; so Wittgenstein was preparing a reception of this sort for us.

Matters seemed to me so serious that, without showing my regiment, I withdrew it into the forest, and hastened off myself to warn Marshal Oudinot of the state of affairs. I found him outside the wood, having dismounted and halted his troops, quietly breakfasting in the middle of his staff. I expected that my report would draw him from this false security; but he received me with an incredulous air, and said, patting my shoulder: 'Oh, come! here has Marbot just found 30,000 men for us to drub!' General Laurencez, his son-in-law and chief of staff, was the only one who believed; he had formerly been aide-de-camp to Augereau, and knew me of old. So he took my part, remarking that when the commander of a regiment says, 'I have seen——,' he ought to be believed; and that to neglect the warnings of light cavalry officers was to run a great risk. This made the marshal reflect, and he was beginning to ask me further questions about the enemy, of whose presence he still seemed to have doubts, when a captain on his staff, M. Duplessis, came up all out of breath, to say that he had been all over the place, and even into the forest, and had not seen a single Russian. Hearing this, the

marshal and his staff fell to laughing at my fears, much to my vexation. I contained myself, however, knowing that the truth would soon appear.

Breakfast ended, the march was resumed, and I returned to my regiment at the head of the column. As before, I took it through the wood, for I foresaw what would happen as soon as we emerged in front of the enemy's position. In spite of all I could say Oudinot insisted on following a very broad road cut straight through the forest; but no sooner had he got near the edge of it than the enemy, perceiving the numerous group formed by the staff, opened a rolling fire from their guns, which were placed facing the road so as to enfilade it. The gilded squadron, lately so cheerful, was thrown into disorder. Happily, no man was touched by the balls, but the marshal's horse was killed, as well as those of M. Duplessis and several others. I was well revenged, and to my shame I admit that I found it hard to conceal the satisfaction which I felt at seeing all those who had laughed at my report and treated what I had said about the enemy's presence as mere fancy running in all directions under a storm of shot and jumping the ditches with all their might to take shelter behind the great pines. Good General Laurencez, whom I had advised to remain in the forest, laughed heartily at the scene. I must do Marshal Oudinot the justice of saying that he was hardly on horseback again when he came to express his regret to me for what had happened at breakfast, and begged me to give him information as to the position of the Russians, and point out the ways by which he could bring his infantry columns through the forest without exposing them too much to artillery fire. Several officers of the 23rd, who had explored the wood with me in the morning, were bidden to guide the divisions. These were received on emerging with a terrible cannonade, which might have been avoided if, warned as we were of the presence of the Russians, we had manœuvred to turn their flank instead of marching straight on their front. Once out of the wood, I was thus compelled to attack the position by the best defended point, and to take the bull by the horns.

At all events, our brave troops attacked the enemy with resolution, and drove him back on all sides, until after two hours' fighting he effected a retreat. This he did not do without danger, for to accomplish it he had to pass through the town and cross a bridge over a stream with steep banks. The operation, always a difficult one when it has to be done fighting, was begun in good order; but our field artillery having come into position on a height commanding the town, its fire soon carried disorder into the enemy's masses, and they fled headlong towards the bridge. After crossing, instead of re-forming their ranks we could see them flying in a crowd over the plains on the opposite bank, their retreat soon turning to a rout. The Toula regiment alone still held its ground at the end of the bridge towards the town. Marshal Oudinot was most anxious to force this passage and complete his victory over the flying troops; but as our infantry columns had barely reached the suburbs, it would take them at least a quarter of an hour to come up before the bridge, and every moment was precious. My regiment, having made a successful charge at the entrance of the town, was now assembled on the promenade not far from the stream. The marshal sent word to me to bring it up at a gallop, and as soon as we reached him he ordered me to charge the battalions which were covering the bridge, cross it, and at once pursue the fugitives on the plain. Experienced soldiers know how hard it is for cavalry to break a brave infantry which defends itself with resolution in the streets of a town. I understood in their full extent the dangers of my task; but it was necessary to obey at once, and, besides, I knew that a regimental commander makes a favourable impression or otherwise on his troops by his conduct in the first fights. My regiment was composed of brave soldiers. I brought them along at a gallop and charged the Russian grenadiers at their head. These received us bravely with the bayonet; but so impetuous was our rush that they were nevertheless broken at the first shock. Having once pierced the enemy's ranks, my chasseurs, dexterously using their points, did fearful execution. The enemy retired across the bridge, we following so closely

that they tried in vain to re-form; they could not succeed in doing so, our troopers being mixed up with them and killing all whom they could reach. The Russian colonel fell dead, and his regiment, losing heart at the loss of their commander, and seeing the French light infantry already at the bridge, laid down their arms. I lost six men killed and about a score wounded, while we captured a colour and 2,000 prisoners.

After the fight I hastened on with my people into the plain, where we took a great number of fugitives, many horses, and several guns. Marshal Oudinot, who had seen the whole affair from the town, came to compliment the regiment. From this day he had a special predilection for it, which it deserved in all respects. I was proud to command such soldiers, and when the marshal informed me that he intended to ask for a colonelcy for me I was quite afraid lest the Emperor might renounce his first intention and give me the first vacant regiment. Things fall out strangely. The action at Wilkomir, where the 23rd covered itself with glory, very nearly became the cause of its destruction later on, because the courage which it had shown on that occasion caused it to be selected for an impracticable operation, of which I shall presently speak.

But let us return to Wilna, where the Emperor was beginning to meet with some of the difficulties which were to wreck his mighty enterprise. The first of these was the organisation of Lithuania. This had to be done in such a way as to attach to us not only the provinces still in Russian operation, but also the duchy of Posen and Galicia, incorporated by treaty in Prussia and Austria, allies whom it was at this moment of such importance to Napoleon to conciliate. The most ardent among the Polish nobility proposed to Napoleon to raise all the provinces and place more than 300,000 men at his disposal as soon as he would officially declare that all the partitions of their country were annulled and the kingdom of Poland reconstituted. But while he saw the advantages which he might derive from this universal levy, the Emperor could not disguise from himself that its first result would be to set him at war with Prussia and Austria, who,

rather than see those fair provinces torn from them, would join forces with the Russians. Above all, however, he feared the unstableness of the Polish nation, who, when they had embroiled him with the three greatest Powers of the North, would perhaps not keep their promises. He answered, therefore, that he would not recognise the kingdom of Poland until the population showed itself worthy of independence by rising against its oppressors. Thus they were revolving in a vicious circle, Napoleon unwilling to recognise Poland until it rose, and the Poles unwilling to act until their nationality was reconstituted. Moreover, what proved that the Emperor's only aim in invading Russia was to re-establish the continental blockade was, that he had made no provision for arming and equipping the troops which the Poles were to raise.

However that may be, some influential noblemen, wishing to force Napoleon's hand, formed themselves at Warsaw into a national Diet, which was joined by a few deputies from different 'circles.' The first act of this assembly was to proclaim the reconstitution and independence of the ancient kingdom of Poland, which patriotic declaration made an immense stir throughout all the provinces, whether Russian, Prussian, or Austrian. For some days people believed in a general rising which would probably have supported Napoleon; but this unreflecting exaltation lasted but a short time, and barely a few hundred Poles came to join us. So quickly did it cool down, that the town and circle of Wilna could not furnish more than twenty men for Napoleon's guard of honour. If the Poles had displayed at that time a fraction of the energy and enthusiasm which they showed in the insurrection of 1830–31, they would perhaps have recovered their independence; but, so far from coming to help the French troops, they refused them the most necessary things, and in the course of this campaign our soldiers had often to take by force the provisions which the inhabitants, and especially the nobles, concealed from us, and yet gave up on their first demand to their persecutors the Russians. This partiality in favour of our enemies disgusted the French soldiers, and

gave rise to some unpleasant scenes, which M. de Ségur calls horrible pillage. But you cannot stop unlucky soldiers, worn out by fatigue, and receiving no rations, from laying hands upon the bread and the animals which they require to feed them.

The necessity of maintaining order compelled the Emperor to appoint prefects and sub-prefects chosen from among the most enlightened Poles; but their administration was illusory, and did no service to the French army. The apathy of the Lithuanian Poles arose mainly from the attachment of the nobles to the Russian Government, which secured their rights over the peasants, whose enfranchisement by the French they dreaded. For all these Polish nobles, who were for ever talking of liberty, held their peasants in the most brutal serfdom.

Although the massing of French troops on their frontiers must have given the Russians notice of the approaching commencement of hostilities, the passage of the Niemen no less took them by surprise; nor did they oppose it at any point. Their army retreated on the Dwina, on the left bank of which river, at Drissa, they had constructed an immense entrenched camp. The various French corps followed the enemy in all directions. Murat commanded the cavalry of the advanced guard, and came in contact every evening with the Russian rear-guard, but after a slight engagement they would retire by forced marches in the night; nor was it ever possible to bring them to a serious action.

CHAPTER XXIII

At our very first entry into Russia the enemy had committed the huge blunder of allowing Napoleon to break their line, with the result that the main body of their troops, led by the Emperor Alexander and Barclay, had been thrown back to the Dwina, while the remainder, under Bagration, was eighty leagues distant, near Mir, on the Upper Niemen. Bagration's plan was to rejoin the Emperor by way of Minsk; but Davout, who was guarding that important point, drove him back upon Bobrinsk, where he knew that Jerome Bonaparte with 60,000 men ought to be on the look-out. Nothing but the bungling of Jerome, who had not only misunderstood the instructions of Davout, but also, refusing to recognise the right to command which long and successful experience had given to the marshal, wished to act on his own judgment, saved Bagration from having to surrender. Even so, Davout, following him up with his wonted temerity, overtook him on the road to Mohileff, and, although he had at the moment only 12,000 men, attacked and beat his force of 36,000. It is true that Bagration was taken by surprise on ground too much enclosed to allow him to bring his whole force into action. Thus pushed back, he crossed the Dnieper low down at Novoï-Bychoff, and, being thenceforth safe from Davout's attack, succeeded in rejoining the main Russian army at Smolensk. In the course of his marches and counter-marches to avoid Davout he surprised Bordesoulle's brigade of cavalry, and captured the entire 3rd Regiment of Chasseurs, of which my friend Saint-Mars was colonel.

The capture of Bagration's corps would have had immense results for Napoleon, and his anger against King Jerome for having let him escape was terrible. He ordered him to leave

the army on the spot and return to Westphalia. This severe if unavoidable measure produced in the army an effect unfavourable to King Jerome; but was he really most to blame? His chief fault was having thought that his dignity as sovereign was inconsistent with taking instructions from a marshal; but the Emperor, who knew quite well that the young prince had never in his life set a battalion in the field, nor taken part in the very smallest action, was surely to blame for allowing him to make his start with an army of 60,000 men, and that in such serious circumstances. General Junot replaced Jerome, and it was not long before he too committed an irreparable blunder.

About this time the Emperor of Russia sent to Napoleon, who was still at Wilna, one of his Ministers, Count Balakhoff. The object of this interview has never been known. Some persons supposed that there was talk of an armistice; but they were quickly undeceived by Count Balakhoff's departure, and it was soon known that the English party, which was very influential in the Russian court and army, had taken offence at his mission. Dreading lest any personal intercourse should take place between Alexander and Napoleon, they required that the Emperor of Russia should leave the army and return to St. Petersburg. Alexander agreed to this, but insisted on taking his brother Constantine with him. The Russian generals, when left to themselves and influenced by Wilson,[1] only thought of giving the war such a ferocious character as might terrify the French. With this view they ordered their troops to make a desert behind them by burning houses and everything which they could not carry away.

On July 15 the columns under Murat, Ney, Montbrun, Nansouty, and Oudinot had reached the Dwina. The last-named, probably misunderstanding the Emperor's orders, made an erratic march, and, descending the Dwina by the left bank, while Wittgenstein's corps was going up it on the opposite side, he appeared before the town of Dunaborg. The fortifications were old and bad, and he hoped to carry

[1 Sir R. Wilson did not join the Russian army till August 14.]

the bridge, cross the river, and attack Wittgenstein in rear. But Wittgenstein on leaving Dünaborg had left there a strong garrison, with plenty of artillery. My regiment was, as usual, with the advanced guard, which Oudinot was that day leading in person. Dünaborg stands on the right bank, and as we came up on the left bank we found it defended by a considerable work which acts as a *tête de pont* to the bridge, which connects the place itself with its outworks beyond the river, here very broad. A quarter of a league from the fortifications, on which Oudinot averred that there were no guns, I espied a Russian battalion, with its left resting on the river and its front covered by the huts of an abandoned camp—a position in which it was very difficult to get at the enemy. The marshal, however, told me to attack them; and, leaving the task of avoiding the huts and passing through the intervals between them to the intelligence of my officers, I gave the word to charge. But hardly had the regiment advanced a few paces, amid a hail of bullets from the Russian infantry, when the artillery, whose existence the marshal had denied, began to thunder from the fortifications. So close were we that the shrapnel passed over our heads before it had time to burst. One of the few round-shot which came with it passed through a fisherman's house, and broke the leg of one of my best trumpeters, who was sounding the charge beside me. I lost several men at this point.

Marshel Oudinot, who had made the serious mistake of attacking a camp of huts protected by cannon and musketry, hoped to dislodge the enemy's infantry by sending a Portuguese battalion against them; but these foreigners, old prisoners of war who had been enlisted in France rather unwillingly, did not face the fire with any energy, and we were still exposed. Seeing that Oudinot was maintaining his position under the enemy's bullets bravely enough, but without giving any orders, I saw that if this state of things lasted a few minutes longer my regiment would be destroyed. So I ordered my chasseurs to open out and charge the Russian infantry in loose order, which had the advantage both of making them give way and of stopping the artillery fire, the gunners being afraid of

hitting their own men. Under the sabres of my troopers the defenders of the camp fled in disorder towards the *tête de pont*; but the garrison entrusted with the defence of that work consisted of newly enlisted soldiers, who, fearing to see us enter with their comrades, closed the gates in a hurry, compelling the fugitives to make for the bridge of boats in order to reach the other bank and take shelter in the town. This bridge had no rail, the boats were unsteady, the river wide and deep, and on the other side I saw the garrison making ready to close the gates. To advance further seemed to me madness, so, thinking that the regiment had done enough, I halted it. Just then the marshal came up, crying 'Brave 23rd! do as you did at Wilkomir: cross the bridge, force the gates, and capture the town.' In vain did General Laurencez try to make him see that the difficulty here was much greater, and that a cavalry regiment could not attack a fortress, however badly guarded, if to get there it had to cross a bad bridge of boats two abreast. The marshal was obstinate. He said they would profit by the enemy's disorder and fright, and ordered me afresh to march on the town. I obeyed; but I had scarcely reached the first compartment of the bridge with my leading section, at the head of which I had felt bound in honour to place myself, when the garrison, having succeeded in closing the gate towards the river, appeared on the top of the ramparts and opened fire upon us. The narrow front which we presented offering but a small mark to unpractised soldiers, the fire caused us much less loss than I should have expected. But when the defenders of the *tête de pont* heard the fortress firing on us they recovered from their scare and began themselves to take a hand in the game. Seeing the 23rd thus placed between two fires, and unable to advance beyond the near end of the shaky bridge, Marshal Oudinot sent me the order to retire. The wide spaces which I had left between my sections allowed them to wheel round without too much disorder, yet two men and their horses fell into the river and were drowned. To regain the left bank we had to pass again under the ramparts of the *tête de pont*, and were again received with a rolling fire, which, very fortunately, proceeded

from unskilful militiamen. If we had had to do with soldiers well accustomed to musketry practice the regiment must have been exterminated. As it was, this unlucky engagement, so imprudently brought about, cost us some thirty men killed and many wounded. One might at least have hoped that the marshal would rest content with this fruitless attempt, especially when, as I said before, he had no instructions from the Emperor to take Dünaborg; but when his infantry came up he ordered a fresh attack upon the *tête de pont*. The enemy had had time to strengthen the garrison of this, troops having hastened up from their cantonments at the sound of the cannon, and our men were repulsed with far heavier loss than the 23rd Chasseurs had suffered. Marshal Oudinot was blamed by the Emperor for this useless attempt.

My regiment was brigaded, as you know, with the 24th. General Castex had from the first day of the brigade's formation made an admirable arrangement of duty. Each of the two regiments, in turns of twenty-four hours, acted as advanced guard when we were going towards the enemy, and as rear-guard in retreating, supplied pickets, reconnoitring parties, and so forth; while the other, following easily, rested from the fatigues of the previous day and made ready for those of the morrow, being at the same time always ready to support its fellow if that had to do with a superior force. By this system the soldiers were never separated from their comrades and their own officers, nor mixed up with those of the other regiment. In the night one half of the brigade slept while the other mounted guard. Of course everything has its inconveniences, and it might happen that one regiment should chance to be more often for duty on days when serious engagements took place, as was the case with the 23rd at Wilkomir and Dünaborg. Indeed, this was its luck throughout most of the campaign; but it did not complain. It always came off with honour, and frequently was envied by the 24th, which got fewer opportunities of distinguishing itself.

Meanwhile Ney's corps, as well as Murat's immense cavalry reserve, were going up by the left bank of the Dwina

towards Polotsk, Wittgenstein's army taking the same direction by the right bank. Having thus the river between them and the enemy, our troopers kept a bad look-out, and, as the French habit is, bivouacked every night much too near the river bank. Wittgenstein, observing this, let Ney's infantry and most of Montbrun's cavalry pass on. Sebastiani's division brought up the rear of the column, its rear-guard being formed by the brigade under Saint-Geniès, formerly an officer in the Army of Egypt, a brave man but not very capable. Having reached a point opposite the little town of Druia, Saint-Geniès, by Sebastiani's orders, fixed his bivouac two hundred yards from the river, believing it impassable except by boat. But Wittgenstein knew of a practicable ford, and under cover of night passed a cavalry division across the stream. Falling on the French army, this carried off nearly the whole of Saint-Geniès' brigade, took the general prisoner, and forced Sebastiani to withdraw on Montbrun's corps promptly with the rest of his division. After this smart stroke Wittgenstein recalled his troops to the right bank and marched on up the Dwina. The affair did much discredit to Sebastiani, and brought him a reprimand from the Emperor.

Not long after this untoward event Oudinot received orders to go up the Dwina and rejoin Ney and Montbrun. His corps, taking the same route which the others had taken, came past the town of Druia. The marshal's plan was to encamp three leagues further on; but, fearing that the enemy might take advantage of the ford to attack his large baggage train, he decided that while he with the army moved on a regiment of Castex's brigade should pass the night, with orders to watch the ford, on the ground where Saint-Geniès had been surprised. My regiment was for duty that day, and the dangerous task of remaining opposite Dwina alone fell to it. I knew that most of Wittgenstein's army had gone on up the river; but I could see that he had left near the ford two strong cavalry regiments—more than would be needed to beat me.

Even if I had wished to carry out literally the order to fix my bivouac on the same spot as Saint-Geniès had occupied

two days before, it would have been impossible for me to do so, the ground being strewn with more than 200 decomposing bodies. But, in addition to this, I had another reason hardly less powerful. All my military experience had convinced me that the best means of defending a river against the attack of an enemy who does not wish to establish himself on your side of it is to keep the bulk of your force at some distance from the stream; first, in order to have timely warning of the enemy's passage; and secondly, because, his purpose being only to strike suddenly and then retire quickly, he will not dare to go far from the bank by which his retreat is secured. So I established my regiment half a league from the Dwina, in a field where the ground was slightly undulating. I had left only a few double vedettes on the river-bank, for I am convinced that, when it is only a question of watching, two men see just as well as a strong picket. Several lines of horsemen were posted between the vedettes and our bivouac, serving like the threads of a spider's web to bring me rapid intelligence of whatever passed on the ground which I had to watch. Furthermore, I had forbidden all fire, even pipe-lights, and enjoined perfect silence. In Russia July nights are very short; however, this appeared to me very long, apprehensive as I was of being attacked in the darkness by a force stronger than my own. Half the men were in the saddle, the rest feeding their horses and ready to mount at the first signal. Everything appeared quiet on the opposite bank when Lorenz, my Polish servant, who spoke Russian perfectly, came and told me that he had heard an old Jewess in a neighbouring house say to another woman: 'The lantern is lighted on the tower of Morki: they are going to attack.' I sent for the women and questioned them through Lorenz, when they replied that, as they feared to see their hamlet become a battlefield, they had been alarmed at seeing the same light shining from the church of the village of Morki, on the opposite bank, which two nights before had been the signal for the Russian troops to cross the ford and charge upon the French camp. Although I was prepared for anything, this information was very useful to me. In

an instant the regiment was mounted, swords were drawn, and the word was passed, in a low voice, for the vedettes on the river-bank and the troopers who were posted across the plain to fall in. Two of the bravest non-commissioned officers, Prud'homme and Graft, went with Lieutenant Bertin to watch the movements of the enemy. In a few moments he came back, announcing that a column of Russian cavalry was crossing the ford, that several squadrons were already on the bank, but that, surprised not to find our camp in the old place, they had halted, doubtless fearing to go too far from the ford. However, they had made up their minds, and were coming on at a walk, being by this time at no great distance from us. Instantly I ordered an immense hayrick and several barns to be set on fire; the flames lighted up the whole country, and I could plainly see the enemy's column, consisting of the Grodno Hussars. I had with me 1,000 brave troopers. With cries of 'Vive l'Empereur!' we galloped upon the Russians, who, surprised at so brisk and unexpected an attack, turned round and fled in disorder, sabred by the chasseurs, towards the ford over which they had come. There they found themselves face to face with a dragoon regiment, which, being brigaded with them, had followed them, and was only just coming out of the river. From the shock and confusion of the two regiments there resulted a fearful disorder, of which my men took advantage to kill a great number of the enemy and capture many horses. The Russians threw themselves in headlong tumult into the ford, and as, in order to escape the shots which my chasseurs were firing from the bank into the distracted crowd, they wanted all to cross at once, a good many were drowned. Our sudden attack in the plain had so astounded the enemy, who expected to catch us asleep, that not one stood on the defensive, but all fled without fighting; so that I had the pleasure of returning to my bivouac without having to lament the loss of one of my men. The dawning day lighted up our battle-field, where lay several hundred of the enemy, killed or wounded. I left them to the care of the inhabitants of the hamlet near which I had passed the night, and went on my

way, rejoining Oudinot's corps that same evening. The marshal gave me a good reception, and complimented the regiment on its fine performance.

In three days the 2nd corps came opposite Polotsk. There we learnt that the Emperor had at last left Wilna after twenty days' stay, and was going towards Witebsk. On moving from Wilna the Emperor left the Duke of Bassano there in the capacity of governor of Lithuania, and General Hogendorf as military commander. Neither of these two officials was fitted to organise the communications of an army; for the Duke of Bassano, an old diplomat and careful secretary, knew nothing of administration; while Hogendorf, a Dutchman, who could hardly speak our language, and had no idea of our military customs and regulations, could not get on with the French who passed through Wilna, or with the local nobility. Thus the wealth of Lithuania was of no assistance to our troops.

Polotsk, on the right bank of the Dwina, consists of wooden houses, and is commanded by a magnificent college, kept at that time by Jesuits, who were nearly all Frenchmen. It is surrounded with earthworks, and sustained a siege in the wars of Charles XII. The corps of Ney, Murat, and Montbrun, on their way from Drissa to Witebsk, had thrown a bridge of boats across the Dwina, opposite Polotsk, which they left for Oudinot's corps. Our destination was the St. Petersburg road, for at this point the 2nd corps took a direction different from that of the Grand Army; nor did we meet it again until the following winter at the passage of the Beresina.

It would take volumes to recount the manœuvres and combats of that part of the army which followed the Emperor to Moscow, so I shall confine myself to mentioning the most important events as I come to them. On July 25 there was an action near Ostrowno, very favourable to our infantry; but several cavalry regiments were brought into action by Murat too precipitately, among them the 16th Chasseurs. My brother, who was a major in that regiment, was captured and taken far beyond Moscow, to Sataroff, on the

Volga, where he found Colonel Saint-Mars and Octave de Ségur. They helped each other mutually to support their wearisome captivity. My brother was already used to it, for he had passed several years in Spanish prisons and hulks. Our fortunes in war were very different; Adolphe, thrice taken prisoner, was never wounded; whereas I was wounded very often, but never captured.

While the Emperor, in possession of Wilna, was unsuccessfully manœuvring to force the Russian army to a decisive battle, Oudinot's corps, after crossing the Dwina at Polotsk, sat down before that town, having in front of it General Wittgenstein's troops, forming the enemy's right wing. Before recounting the incidents which took place on the banks of the Dwina I ought to say something of the composition of the 2nd corps. Marshal Oudinot had at first under his orders only 44,000 men, distributed among three infantry divisions, whose commanders were Generals Legrand, Verdier, and Merle, all three excellent officers, especially the first. Among the generals of brigade, Albert and Maison were conspicuous. The cavalry consisted of a superb division of cuirassiers and lancers, commanded by General Dumerc, a somewhat commonplace officer, having under him the brave Major-General Berckheim. There were also two brigades of light cavalry; the first, composed of the 23rd and 24th Chasseurs, was commanded by General Castex, an excellent soldier in all respects; the second, formed by the 7th and 20th Chasseurs and the 8th Polish Lancers, were under General Corbineau, a brave but indolent man. These two brigades were not formed into a division; the marshal attached them as they were wanted, now to the infantry divisions, now to the advanced or to the rear guard —a system which had great advantages.

The 24th Chasseurs, with which my regiment was brigaded, was excellently constituted, and might have done great service if there had been a bond of sympathy between the soldiers and their commander. Unluckily, Colonel A—— was very harsh towards his subordinates, who, on their side, were not well disposed towards him. This state

of things decided General Castex to march and camp with the 23rd, and to mess with me, although he had served in the 24th. Colonel A——, tall, active, always perfectly mounted, generally showed well in hand-to-hand combats, but was reputed to be less fond of musketry and artillery. With all his faults, the Emperor appreciated in him one quality, which he possessed in the highest degree: he was undoubtedly the best light cavalry officer in any European army. A finer tact or equal judgment in exploring a country with a glance was never seen. Before traversing a district he divined the obstacles which maps did not show, foresaw the points where streams, roads, or the smallest paths must come out, and could draw from the enemy's movements inferences which nearly always came true. Both in the details and in the general conception of war, he was a most remarkable officer. The Emperor, who in former campaigns had frequently employed him on reconnoissances, had brought him under the notice of Marshal Oudinot, by whom he was often called to counsel; the result of this being that many tasks and dangerous duties perforce fell to the share of my regiment.

CHAPTER XXIV

As soon as the corps which had preceded us to Polotsk had gone on to join the Emperor at Witebsk, Oudinot massed all his troops in one huge column on the St. Petersburg road, and on July 29 marched against Wittgenstein, whom he knew to be in position ten leagues from us between two towns named Sebesh and Nevel. That night we slept on the banks of the Drissa, an affluent of the Dwina. At Sivoshina, where the high road to St. Petersburg crosses it, it is no more than a large brook. There was no bridge; but the Russian Government had had the lofty banks sloped away on both sides, and the bottom of the stream paved to a width equal to the road. There was thus a practicable ford, but the bank was so steep on either hand that troops and wagons could not cross to right or left of it. This detail is necessary, because a few days later an active engagement took place there.

On the next day, my regiment being for duty, I took my place at the head of the advanced guard, and, followed by the whole army corps, crossed the ford of the Drissa. The heat was most oppressive; in the dusty wheat on each side of the road could be seen two broad bands where the crushed and flattened straw, looking as if a roller had gone over it, marked the passage of large columns of infantry. Suddenly, close to the post station of Kliastitsi, these tracks disappeared from the edge of the high road, and appeared again to the left on a broad cross-road ending at Jakobowo. It was evident that the enemy had at this point turned away from the direction of Sebesh to throw himself on our left flank. Matters seemed to me serious. I halted the troops and sent a message to my brigadier. But the marshal, who usually

marched within sight of the advanced guard, noticing the halt, galloped up, and, in spite of all that Generals Castex and Laurencez could say, ordered me to keep on along the high road. I had hardly gone a league when I saw a kibitka, or Russian carriage, coming towards us, drawn by two post-horses. I stopped it, and found a Russian officer who had fallen asleep in the heat, and was lying at full length at the bottom of the carriage. He was a young man, son of the landowner to whom the station of Kliastitsi belonged, and aide-de-camp to General Wittgenstein, and was returning from St. Petersburg with an answer to despatches sent by his general to the Government. His astonishment when he awoke with a start to find himself in the presence of our chasseurs with their forbidding countenances, and saw close by a French army, cannot be described. He could not understand how he had failed to meet the army of Wittgenstein, or at any rate some of his scouts, between Sebesh and the point where we were, which only confirmed General Castex and me in our belief that Wittgenstein had been setting a trap for Oudinot by quitting abruptly the road to St. Petersburg in order to throw himself on the rear and left flank of our army, and in fact we soon heard the sound of cannon, and shortly after that of musketry. Marshal Oudinot, although surprised at so unforeseen an attack, got out of the fix pretty well. Ordering the various portions of his column to left-face, he got them into line, and so vigorously repulsed Wittgenstein's first attack, that the Russian thought it best not to try again that day, and retired behind Jakobowo. His cavalry, however, had a fair measure of success, for it captured in our rear a thousand men and part of the baggage, including our field forges. This was a serious loss, of which the cavalry of the 2nd corps was painfully conscious throughout the campaign. After this engagement Oudinot's troops took up their position, while Castex's brigade was ordered to march back as far as Kliastitsi and guard the point where the roads divided, General Maison's infantry presently joining us. The Russian officer, a prisoner in his own father's house, did the honours of it very gracefully.

Meanwhile, preparations were being made by the commanders on both sides for a serious engagement on the morrow, and at daybreak the Russians marched on the post-house of Kliastitsi, on which the French right rested. Although in such circumstances the whole brigade was employed, the regiment for duty formed the first line, and to-day it was the turn of the 24th. To avoid all delay, General Castex put himself at the head of the regiment, and led them at the Russian battalions, breaking them and taking 400 prisoners with very small loss. He was the first to enter the enemy's ranks. His horse was killed by a bayonet, and the general in his fall sprained his foot. It was several days before he could lead the brigade again, and Colonel A—— took the command. The Russian battalions which the 24th had cut up were at once replaced by others which debouched from Jakobowo, and advanced rapidly upon us. The marshal sent orders to M. A—— to attack them, and he gave the word for the second line to pass to the front, which I duly executed. As soon as the 23rd were re-formed in line we marched upon the Russian infantry, which halted and steadily awaited us; it was the Tamboff regiment. When we were within striking distance I gave the word to charge. This was carried out all the more efficiently for the stimulus which the fact that their comrades of the 24th were watching them gave to my troopers. The enemy committed the serious blunder, as I think it, of spending all his fire at once, by giving us a volley, which badly aimed as it was emptied but few saddles. A file fire would have been far more destructive. Before the Russians could reload we were upon them at the full speed of our excellent horses, and the shock was so violent that they were overthrown in heaps. Many rose again and tried to defend themselves with the bayonet against the troopers' points; but after losing heavily they fell back, and at last broke, many being killed or captured as they fled towards a cavalry regiment which was coming up to their aid. It was the Grodno Hussars. Now I have observed that when one regiment has beaten another it always retains the superiority, and here I had a fresh proof

of it, for the 23rd dashed at the Grodno Hussars, whom they had beaten so soundly in the night engagement at Druia, as at an easy prey; while the hussars, recognising their conquerors, fled in all haste. Throughout the rest of the campaign this regiment was always meeting the 23rd, which steadily preserved the upper hand.

While these events were taking place on our right, the infantry of the centre and left had attacked the Russians, who, beaten all along the line, left the field of battle, and took up their position at nightfall a league away. Our army retained its ground between Jakobowo and the division of the roads at Kliastitsi. Great was the joy at our victory in the bivouacs of the brigade that evening.

My regiment had taken the colour of the Tamboff regiment, and the 24th that of the Russian regiment which it had broken; but its satisfaction was dashed by the fact that both its majors were wounded. The senior, M. Monginot, was in all respects an officer of the highest merit; the other was the colonel's brother, and, though he had not his abilities, was a most valiant officer. They both soon got well, and served throughout the campaign.

When a force tries to turn its enemy's flank it is liable itself to be turned. That was what happened to Wittgenstein, for, having, on the 29th, left the St. Petersburg road to fling himself on the left and rear of the French army, he had endangered his own line of communications; and if Oudinot had followed up his victory of the 30th with vigour, it might have been completely cut. The Russian general's position seemed still more hazardous when he learnt that Marshal Macdonald, having crossed the Dwina and taken Dünaborg, was advancing on his rear. To get out of this fix, Wittgenstein had cleverly employed the whole night after the battle in making a détour across-country, bringing his army by Jakobowo back to the St. Petersburg road, beyond the post station of Kliastitsi. Fearing, however, lest the French right, near which he must pass, should charge his troops during their flank march, he resolved to stop it by himself attacking our right wing with a superior force, while the rest of his army was executing the

movement which was to reopen his communications with Sebesh. Next morning, as my regiment was going on duty at daybreak, a portion of the enemy's army, which we had beaten on the previous day, was seen to have turned our extreme right, in full retreat to Sebesh, while the remainder was coming to attack us at Kliastitsi. In an instant all Marshal Oudinot's troops stood to their arms; but while the generals were making their arrangements a column of Russian grenadiers attacked and routed the Portuguese legion, and was marching on the large and solid post-house. It was on the point of capturing this important position, when the marshal, always foremost under fire, hurried up to my regiment, which by this time was at the outposts, and ordered me to try to stop the enemy, or at least delay him till our infantry could come up. I took my regiment along at a gallop and ordered them to charge, taking the enemy's line obliquely from its right, which always hampers infantry fire considerably. That of the grenadiers was, therefore, ineffective, and they would soon have felt our sabres. They were wavering already, when, whether instinctively or by order from their commander, they faced about and ran for a deep ditch which lay behind them, jumping into it, and, covered up to the chin, they opened a well-sustained file fire. In a moment I had six or seven men killed and a score wounded, and received myself a bullet in the left shoulder. My troopers were wild; but our rage was powerless against men whom we were physically unable to reach. At this critical moment General Maison came up with his brigade of infantry, and ordered me to retire behind his battalions; then he attacked the ditch from both flanks, killing or capturing all its defenders. As for me, I was taken severely wounded to the post-house, and helped to dismount with difficulty. Dr. Parot, our regimental surgeon-major, came to dress me; but the operation had hardly begun when it had to be interrupted. The Russian infantry was renewing its attack, and bullets were dropping like hail about us; so that we had to move out of range. The doctor found my wound serious: it would have been mortal had not the thick twisted fringe of my epaulette turned

the bullet and greatly deadened the force of the blow. This, however, was hard enough to throw me violently back till my body touched the croup of my horse; the officers and men who were behind me thought I was killed, and I should have fallen if my orderlies had not held me up. The dressing was very painful, as the bullet had stuck in the bones just where the humerus is joined to the clavicle. To extract it the wound had to be enlarged, and the great scar is still to be seen. I confess that if I had been colonel I should have accompanied the troops of wounded who were being sent to Polotsk, crossed the Dwina, and gone to some town in Lithuania where I could get attended to. But I was only major; the Emperor might come posting in a day from Witebsk to review the regiments, and he never did anything except for soldiers present under arms. This rule, which at first sight seems cruel, was really in the interest of the service. It kept up the zeal of those who had been wounded, and made them eager to rejoin their regiments as soon as they could, instead of dawdling in hospital, and the army gained much in efficient strength. Besides, I had every inducement to stay: success against the enemy, attachment to the regiment, the fact that I had been wounded when fighting with it. So I stayed, though suffering intolerable pain, and, putting my arm as well as I could into a sling, and getting hoisted on to my horse, went back to the regiment.

Since I had received my wound the aspect of affairs was much changed; our men had beaten Wittgenstein and taken many prisoners. However, the Russians had succeeded in reaching the St. Petersburg road and effecting their retreat towards Sebesh. In order to reach this town from Kliastitsi it is necessary to cross the vast swamp of Khodanui through which the great road is carried on an embankment formed of huge fir-stems laid side by side. A ditch, or rather a broad and deep canal, runs along each side of the embankment, and there is no other means of passing without going a long way in the direction of Sebesh. This passage is more than a league in length, but the wooden road is of considerable width. As, therefore, it was impossible to place skirmishers

in the marsh, the Russians retired in dense columns along this artificial road, beyond which our maps marked a plain. Marshal Oudinot, wishing to complete his victory, decided to pursue them, and to this end he had already sent Verdier's infantry division by the road through the marsh, to be followed first by Castex's cavalry brigade and then by the whole army corps. My regiment had not yet taken its place in the column when I rejoined it. On seeing me resume my place at their head in spite of my wound, officers and men received me with a general cheer, which, as showing the esteem and regard which the good fellows had conceived for me, touched me deeply. I felt especially grateful for the satisfaction which my colleague Major Fontaine expressed on seeing me again. This officer, though a brave and highly capable man, had so little ambition that he remained captain for eighteen years, thrice declined a majority, and only accepted it at the Emperor's express order.

I resumed then the command of the 23rd, and we made our way through the marsh after Verdier's division; the near sections of the enemy's column contenting themselves with firing a few long shots while we were on the causeway. As soon, however, as our infantry debouched into the plain they saw the Russian army deployed, and were received by a heavy fire of artillery. In spite of their losses the French battalions marched forward, and soon were all in the open ground. Then it was the turn of my regiment to show itself on the plain at the head of the brigade. Colonel A——, who was provisionally in command, not being there to give us orders, I thought to get my regiment as soon as possible away from the dangerous place, and gave the word to gallop as soon as the infantry made room for me. Even so I had seven or eight men killed and many more wounded, while the 24th also suffered heavily. It was the same with General Legrand's infantry division; but as soon as this had formed in the plain Marshal Oudinot attacked the enemy, and their artillery had to distribute its fire upon several points, so that the issue from the causeway would have become less dangerous for the other troops, had not Wittgenstein at that

moment attacked the troops which we had in the open ground with his entire force. Being outnumbered, we had to give way till the rest of our army came up, and were compelled to retreat towards the causeway. Fortunately the way was very broad, which made it easy for us to march in sections. Directly we left the plain the cavalry became more a hindrance than a help, so the marshal withdrew that first. It was followed by Verdier's infantry division, the general himself having been very severely wounded. Legrand's division formed the rear-guard, and his rear brigade, under General Albert, had to maintain a brisk fight just as its last battalions were on the point of entering the marsh. Once they were in column, however, General Albert placed eight guns to bring up the rear, and these as they retired fired upon the enemy's advanced guard, causing it considerable loss. His own guns, indeed, were only able to fire at rare intervals, because after every round they had to face about once to continue the pursuit, and once again to fire, and these movements take time and cause a good deal of trouble in a narrow space. Thus the Russian artillery did us very little damage in passing the marsh. Night was drawing on when the French troops issued from the causeway, passed Kliastitsi, and found themselves on the banks of the Drissa, at the ford of Sivoshina, which they had crossed in the morning in pursuit of the Russians, after beating them at Kliastitsi.[1] They had now taken their revenge, for, after having killed and wounded 700 or 800 of our men on the other side of the marsh, they were in their turn driving us at the sword's point. In order to put an end to the fighting and give our army a little repose, Marshal Oudinot made it cross the ford and encamp at Bieloe.

It was early in the night when our outposts on the Drissa sent word that the enemy was crossing the stream. Marshal Oudinot betook himself promptly to the spot, and observed that eight Russian battalions, with fourteen guns on

[1 The topography here seems somewhat confused. Sivoshina is some miles to the south of Kliastitsi, and, as will be seen by reference to p. 234 the French had crossed the ford before the action at the latter place.]

their front, had just taken up their quarters on the left bank. The bulk of their army was on the other side, no doubt making ready to cross and attack us on the next day. The advanced guard was commanded by General Kulnieff, a man of much enterprise, but having, like most of the Russian officers of that time, the bad habit of drinking too much brandy. He must have taken an extra quantity that evening, for otherwise it would be impossible to explain the huge blunder which he made in coming, with only eight battalions, to encamp close to an army of 40,000 men, and that under conditions most unfavourable to himself. He had, in fact, 200 paces in rear of his line the Drissa, which except at the ford could not be forced—not, indeed, on account of its depth, but because its vertical banks were fifteen to twenty feet high. Kulnieff therefore had no way of retreat but by the ford; and could he expect in case he were defeated that his eight battalions and fourteen guns could get away with sufficient rapidity by this one passage in face of the whole French army, which at any moment could come down upon them from its position close by? But General Kulnieff must have been in no condition to make these reflections when he fixed his camp on the left bank of the stream. It was certainly surprising that Wittgenstein should have relied on Kulnieff, whose intemperate habits he must have known, to settle the position of his advanced guard.

While the head of the Russian column was being arrogantly brought to so short a distance from us, great confusion prevailed, not among the French troops but among their leaders. Marshal Oudinot, one of the bravest of men, was wanting in decision, and passed in a moment from planning an attack to making arrangements for retreat. The loss which he had suffered on the further side of the great marsh had thrown him into much perplexity, and he did not know how he was to carry out the Emperor's orders, according to which he was to drive Wittgenstein back on the St. Petersburg road at least as far as Sebesh and Newel. It was therefore with much joy that he received during the night a despatch announcing the immediate arrival of a Bavarian

corps commanded by General Saint-Cyr, whom the Emperor placed under his orders. But instead of awaiting this reinforcement in a good position, Oudinot wanted, following the advice of General Dulauloy of the artillery, to go and meet the Bavarians by withdrawing his whole army as far as Polotsk. This extraordinary idea met with a lively opposition from the council of generals whom the marshal had called together. General Legrand explained that though our success of the morning had been counterbalanced by the losses of the evening the army was perfectly well disposed to march against the enemy; that to make it beat a retreat on Polotsk would have the effect of lowering its tone and displaying it to the Bavarians as a vanquished force coming to seek shelter with them; in short, that the mere idea would be degrading to every French heart. Legrand's warm address carried the votes of all the generals, and the marshal declared that he renounced his plan of retreat. One important question remained to be settled: what should be done when daylight appeared? General Legrand, with the authority of long and distinguished service and great experience in war, proposed that we should take advantage of Kulnieff's mistake, attack the Russian advance guard which had been placed so imprudently without support on our bank, and drive it into the Drissa. The marshal and all the council accepted this plan, and its execution was entrusted to General Legrand.

Oudinot's army was encamped in a forest of large fir-trees standing well apart. Beyond it was a large clearing. The edge of the wood formed an arc, of which the river was the chord. The Russian battalions were bivouacking very close to the river opposite the ford, with fourteen guns in battery along its front. Wishing to surprise the enemy, General Legrand ordered General Albert to place a regiment of infantry in the wood at each extremity of the arc, and, as soon as he heard the sound of cavalry in march, to advance upon both flanks of the enemy's camp, while the cavalry issuing from the wood at the middle of the arc was to charge at full speed upon the Russian battalions and drive them

into the ravine. The duty assigned to the cavalry was clearly one of great peril; for not only had it to deliver a front attack upon the enemy's line, but before reaching it to receive the fire of fourteen guns. It is true that by surprising the Russians we had a good hope of catching them asleep and meeting with little resistance.

My regiment, having, as you have seen, been on duty the whole of July 31, was as usual to be relieved by the 24th at 1 A.M. on August 1. That regiment was therefore ordered to attack, and mine to act in reserve, for the vacant space between the wood and the stream would only hold one regiment of cavalry. Colonel A—— went to Oudinot and remarked that there was reason to fear that while we were making ready to fight the troops in front of us Wittgenstein would have sent a small column off to our right to cross the Drissa at a ford which probably existed three leagues higher than the point where we were, work round to our rear, and carry off our wounded and our baggage, and that it would therefore be as well to send a cavalry regiment to watch the ford in question. The marshal fell in with this idea, and Colonel A——, whose regiment had just gone on duty, ordered it to mount at once, and, taking it off on the proposed expedition, left the risk of the anticipated combat to the 23rd. My brave regiment, however, received the announcement of the dangerous task which it had to perform very calmly, and was delighted to see the marshal and General Legrand pass along the front of the line to superintend our preparations for the attack.

At that period all the French regiments except the cuirassiers had a picked or grenadier company or troop, which was always placed on the right of the line. That of the 23rd was in its place accordingly, when General Legrand remarked to the marshal that as the enemy's artillery was in front of his centre, and this would consequently be the point of greatest danger, it would be best, in order to avoid all possible hesitation, that the attack at that point should be made by the picked troops, consisting of the most seasoned men and the best horses. It was of no use to assure the

marshal that the regiment, being almost entirely composed of veteran soldiers, was in all respects, moral and physical, just as strong in one part as another; he ordered me to place the picked troop in the centre. I obeyed, and, calling together my officers, I explained to them in a low voice what we had to do, and gave them notice that, in order to surprise the enemy better, I should confine myself to giving the word 'Charge,' without any preliminary command, as soon as our line was in short striking distance of the enemy's guns. Everything being settled, the regiment came out of its bivouac in dead silence with the first streak of dawn, and passed through the wood easily enough. Then we entered the level clearing, at the further end of which was the Russian encampment. Alone of the whole regiment, I had no sword in my hand, for my right, the only one which I could use, was occupied in holding the reins—a painful position, as you can understand, for a cavalry officer who was just about to lead a charge. But I was determined to march with my regiment, and so took my place in front of the picked troop, having close to me its brave captain, M. Courteau, one of the best officers in the regiment, and the one to whom I was most attached.

All was perfectly quiet in the Russian camp as we advanced noiselessly at a walk, and my hope of surprising it rose when I saw that General Kulnieff had brought no cavalry across the ford, and we could distinguish by the faint light of the fires only a few infantry sentries, and those so near the camp that between the time they gave notice and our sudden appearance it was probable that the Russians would not be able to prepare for the defence. But suddenly, two ugly Cossacks, prowling and suspicious beings, appeared on horseback thirty paces from my line, looked at it for a moment, and sped away towards the camp, where, it was clear, they would announce our coming. This was a most disagreeable mishap, since but for it we should certainly have fallen upon the Russians without losing a single man. However, as we were discovered, and were, besides, approaching the point at which I had settled to quicken the pace, I put

my horse into a gallop. The whole regiment did the same, and very soon I let them have the word to charge. Thereupon all my valiant troops dashed with me towards the camp, and we fell upon it like a thunderbolt. But the Cossacks had given the alarm; the gunners, who were lying close to their pieces, snatched up their linstocks, and the guns at once belched grape at my regiment. Thirty-seven men, of whom nineteen belonged to the picked troop, fell dead on the spot, including Captain Courteau and Lieutenant Lallouette. Before the Russian gunners could reload they were cut down by our men. We had few wounded, nearly every hit having been mortal; some forty of our horses had been killed; mine was lamed by a grape-shot, but was able to carry me into the camp, where the Russian infantry, suddenly aroused, were already hurrying to their arms. The chasseurs by my orders had placed themselves between them and the piled arms, so that very few were able to get at their muskets and open fire on us. At the sound of the cannon General Albert's two regiments of infantry had issued from the wood and hastened at the double to the two ends of the camp, where they were bayoneting all who tried to defend themselves. The Russians, in their confusion, could not resist this triple attack, and great part of them, who, having come across at night, had not been able to see the height of the banks, tried to escape in that direction, and fell fifteen or twenty feet on to the rocks. In this way many perished.

General Kulnieff, scarcely awake, made his way towards a group of 2,000 men, of whom a third at most had muskets, and, following mechanically this disordered crowd, appeared at the ford. But on entering the camp I had caused this important point to be held by 500 or 600 cavalry, including the picked troop. These men, enraged at the loss of their captain, dashed furiously at the Russians, and a great slaughter ensued. General Kulnieff, already swaying on his horse with intoxication, attacked Sergeant Legendre, who ran him through the throat, stretching him dead at his feet. In his account of the campaign of 1812, M. de Ségur makes Kulnieff, when dying, deliver an oration, like a hero

in Homer. I was a few paces from Sergeant Legendre when he plunged his sabre into Kulnieff's throat, and I can certify that the Russian general fell dead without uttering a word.[1] The victory of General Albert's infantry and the 23rd was complete. The enemy lost at least 2,000 killed and wounded, and we took nearly 4,000 prisoners; the rest perished in the fall on to the sharp rocks. A few of the more nimble succeeded in rejoining Wittgenstein, who, on learning the sanguinary defeat of his advanced guard, retreated on Sebesh.

Emboldened by this brilliant success, Marshal Oudinot resolved to pursue the Russians, and again passed the army to the right bank of the Drissa; but in order to allow Albert's brigade and the 23rd time to recover from the fatigues of the action, he left them posted in observation on the field of battle. I took advantage of this rest to perform a ceremony seldom enough attended to in time of war, namely, to pay the last duties to those of our brave comrades who had fallen. A good-sized trench received them all, laid according to their ranks, with Captain Courteau and his lieutenant at the head of the line. Then the fourteen Russian guns, which the 23rd had so valiantly captured, were placed in front of the soldiers' grave.

This pious duty completed, I thought I would have my wound dressed, as it was causing me intense pain, and sat down for that purpose a little way off, under a huge pine. There I saw a young major, who, with his back against the trunk of the tree, and supported by two grenadiers, was painfully fastening a small packet the address of which was traced with blood; the blood was his own. He belonged to Albert's brigade, and had received in the attack on the Russian camp a fearful bayonet wound which had laid his

[1] We read in M. de Ségur's book: 'The death of Kulnieff was, it is said, heroic. A cannon-ball broke both his legs and threw him down on one of his own guns. Then, seeing the French approaching, he tore off his decorations, and, in wrath with himself for his rashness, condemned himself to die on the scene of his blunder, ordering his men to leave him to his fate.'

body open. The wound had been dressed, but the blood continued to flow, and the stroke had been a deadly one. The poor man, who was aware of this, had wished before he succumbed to send his adieux to a lady to whom he was attached, but after he had written it he did not know to whom to entrust the precious missive. Just then chance brought me in his way. We knew each other only by sight; still, feeling that death was close at hand, he begged me in a scarcely audible voice to do him two services, and after having sent the grenadiers a little way off, he gave me the packet, saying, with tears in his eyes, 'There is a portrait in it.' He made me promise to place it with secrecy in the proper hands if I was ever fortunate enough to return to Paris; 'besides,' he added, 'there is no hurry, for it will be better that it should not be received till long after I am no more.' I promised to discharge this sad commission, but it was two years before I was able to do so. As for the second entreaty that the young major addressed to me, it was complied with two hours afterwards. It was painful to him to think of his body being torn to pieces by the wolves, with which the country swarms, and he begged that I would place him beside the captain and troopers of the 23rd, whose burial he had seen. I undertook to do so, and the poor officer having died soon after our interview, I carried out his last wishes.

CHAPTER XXV

PROFOUNDLY touched by this melancholy episode, I was plunged in sad reflections, when I was roused from my reverie by the distant sound of a lively cannonade. The two armies were again engaged. It turned out that Marshal Oudinot, having passed the station of Kliastitsi, had come up with the Russian rear-guard at the entry of the marsh, the issue from which had been so deadly to us twenty-four hours before, and had set himself to drive the enemy back into it. But the enemy, not being disposed to pass this dangerous strait, had made a counter-attack in force upon the French troops, who after considerable loss were retreating, pursued by the Russians. One would have said that Oudinot and Wittgenstein were playing prisoners' base: when one advanced the other retired, to pursue in his turn as soon as the adversary had beat a retreat. This new recoil on Oudinot's part was announced to us on the battlefield of Sivoshina by an aide-de-camp, who at the same time brought an order to General Albert to take his brigade and the 23rd Chasseurs two leagues to the rear in the direction of Polotsk. At the moment of starting, as I did not wish to abandon the fourteen guns which my regiment had captured in the morning, the horses which had drawn them from the enemy having also fallen into our hands, we harnessed them and drove them to our next bivouac, whence this glorious trophy of the courage of the 23rd was forwarded the next night to Polotsk, and our fourteen guns very shortly rendered efficacious help in the defence of that town. Oudinot's army retreated that day as far as the ford of Sivoshina, while Wittgenstein, rendered more cautions by the disaster which his advance guard had incurred at the same spot that

morning, did not dare to venture any detached corps on the bank occupied by our troops, and, with the Drissa between them, both armies took up their positions for the night. But on August 2, Oudinot having brought his troops near Polotsk, both sides were in such need of rest, that hostilities ceased for some days. The good General Castex rejoined us, and also the 24th, who were by no means grateful to their colonel for having carried them off just when it was their turn to attack the Russian camp, while on their way up to Drissa they had neither seen a single enemy nor found the supposed ford.

After a few days' rest Wittgenstein took part of his troops lower down the Dwina, where Macdonald was threatening his right. Marshal Oudinot having followed the Russian army in that direction, they faced round towards us, and for eight or ten days there were continual marches and counter-marches, and many small engagements, of which it would be too long and too troublesome to give particulars, seeing that all this led to no other result than a useless slaughter of men, and a proof that the commanders of the two armies were lacking in decision. The most serious of the combats which were fought during this short period took place on August 13, near the splendid convent of Valensoui, on the banks of the Svolna. This little stream, the banks of which are very muddy, lay between the French and the Russians, and it was evident that whichever of the two generals tried to force a passage over such unfavourable ground would incur a sanguinary repulse. Accordingly, neither Wittgenstein nor Oudinot had any plan of crossing the Svolna at this point; but, instead of going elsewhere to look for a battlefield on which they might try conclusions, both took up their position on the stream, as though in mutual defiance. Very soon a brisk cannonade was set up between the two banks; utterly useless, because on neither side could the troops reach their adversary; so that this deplorable fighting could not be of the least advantage to anybody. Wittgenstein, however, to spare his soldiers, had merely posted a few battalions of infantry among the willows and reeds on the river's edge,

keeping his other troops out of range of the French guns, whose well-sustained fire only reached a few of his skirmishers. Oudinot, however, insisted, in spite of the prudent remarks of several generals, on bringing his first line near the river, and thus incurred losses which he could and should have avoided. The Russian artillery is far from being as good as ours, but on campaign it employs pieces called *unicorns*, the range of which was longer than that of any French guns of that period, and it was these that did the greatest execution among our troops.

Marshal Oudinot, pursuaded that the enemy was going to cross the stream, not only kept a division of infantry near enough to repulse them, but also made General Castex's cavalry support it; a superfluous precaution, since the crossing of even a small river requires more time than the defenders need to come up to meet the attack. In spite of this, my regiment and the 24th were exposed for twenty-four hours to the Russian cannon-balls, which killed and maimed a good many of our men.

While this action was going on, the aide-de-camp whom Oudinot had sent to the Emperor at Witebsk with the report of the fighting at Kliastitsi and Sivoshina returned. Napoleon lavishly rewarded the 2nd corps, both with promotions and with decorations, to show that he did not hold the troops responsible for the ill-success of our operations. Four Crosses of the Legion of Honour were awarded to each cavalry regiment; but with regard to the 23rd Chasseurs Berthier added that, in order to express his satisfaction at the admirable conduct of the regiment in the various engagements, the Emperor sent it, over and above the four rewards given to the other regiments, fourteen decorations, one for each gun captured by it from Kulnieff's advanced guard. I had therefore eighteen crosses to distribute to my brave regiment. The aide-de-camp had not brought the patents, but the chief of the staff supplemented his message by asking the commanders of regiments to indicate the soldiers who should receive them, and send him the list. I assembled all the captains, and, guiding myself by their advice, I drew up

my list and went to present it to Marshal Oudinot, begging him to let me announce it on the spot to the regiment. 'What? here among the cannon-balls?' 'Yes, marshal, among the cannon-balls; it would be more chivalrous.'

General Laurencez, who, as senior staff officer, had drawn up the report of the various actions, and warmly eulogised the 23rd Chasseurs, being of my opinion, the marshal acceded to my request. The decorations would not come till later, but I sent for a piece of ribbon which I happened to have in my baggage, and, cutting it into eighteen pieces, I made known to the regiment the rewards which had been granted them by the Emperor. Then, calling the recipients out of the ranks in their turn, I gave each a bit of the red ribbon, which then was so coveted, and so honourably borne, and of which the distinction has been since so sadly lowered by the way in which it has been lavished—I may say prostituted. This distribution in presence of the enemy, under fire, produced an immense effect on the regiment, and their enthusiasm rose to the highest point when I called old Sergeant Prud'homme, justly reputed the bravest and the most modest soldier in the whole regiment. Calm as ever, this hero, famous in many brilliant actions, came up with a shy demeanour and received the ribbon amid the hearty cheers of all the squadrons. It was a real triumph for him. I shall never forget this touching scene, which, as I have said, took place under the guns of the enemy. But no happiness is complete. Two men whom I had got on my list as most nearly rivalling Prud'homme in desert had just been cruelly wounded: Sergeant Legendre, the slayer of General Kulnieff, had had an arm carried away, and Corporal Griffon a leg smashed. They were undergoing amputation when I proceeded to the ambulance to give them their decorations. At the sight of the ribbon of the Legion of Honour they seemed to forget their pain, and broke forth into the liveliest joy. Legendre, however, did not survive his wound long, but Griffon got well and was sent back to France; some years afterwards I came across him again at the Invalides.

The 24th Chasseurs, which only got four decorations,

while the 23rd got eighteen, admitted that it was fair, but none the less displayed its regret at having lost the honour of capturing the fourteen Russian guns, even at the cost of incurring the losses which we had undergone. 'We are soldiers,' they said, 'and we must take our luck as it comes.' But they were very sore with their colonel for what they called superseding them. What an army was that of which the soldiers claimed as a privilege to march against the enemy!

You are doubtless asking what I got for myself in this distribution of rewards. Nothing whatever; because the Emperor, before deciding to withdraw the command of the regiment from Colonel de la Nougarède by promoting him, wished to be sure that his health would allow him to serve as general, or head of a legion of gendarmerie. Marshal Oudinot was therefore directed to have him examined by a medical board. Their opinion was that he would never be able to ride again, and the marshal accordingly gave him leave to return to France, where he was put in command of a second-class fortress. Before leaving Polotsk, whither he had been compelled by infirmity to retire, the poor colonel wrote me a very touching letter in which he took leave of the 23rd; and although he had never led the regiment into action, which attaches troops more than anything to their commander, he was nevertheless regretted, as he well deserved. The regiment being thus left without a colonel, the marshal expected to receive notice of my promotion to that rank, and I frankly admit that I also quite hoped for it; but the Emperor having left Witebsk to march on Smolensk, departmental business slackened under the stress of business caused by military operations. It wasstill three months before I got my step.

But let us return to the banks of the Svolna. The French retired hurriedly, leaving a portion of their wounded in the convent of Valensoui. Among those whom we succeeded in removing was Colonel Casabianca, of the 11th Light Infantry, who had been my comrade in the days when we were both serving as aides-de-camp to Masséna. He

was an officer of the highest merit, and promotion had come to him very quickly; but he was struck in the head when visiting the skirmishers of his regiment on the banks of the Svolna, and his career was cut short. He was dying when I saw him on a stretcher carried by the pioneers. He knew me, and, pressing my hand, said how sorry he was to see our corps led in such poor style. That very evening the unfortunate colonel breathed his last. His dying words were only too well-founded; for our chief seemed to act with neither method nor plan. After a success he would pursue Wittgenstein without heeding any obstacle, and spoke of nothing but driving him to St. Petersburg. But at the least check he would quickly retreat, and see an enemy everywhere. It was under this latter impression that he brought his troops back under the walls of Polotsk, much annoyed as they were at being thus made to retreat before the Russians, whom they had beaten in almost every encounter.

On August 15, the Emperor's *fête* day, the 2nd army corps arrived, in very low spirits, at Polotsk, where we found the 6th corps, formed by two fine Bavarian divisions, under General Wrede, and commanded in chief by a French general, Gourion Saint-Cyr! The Emperor had sent this reinforcement of 8,000 to 10,000 men to Marshal Oudinot, who would have received it with more satisfaction if he had not dreaded the influence of its leader. Saint-Cyr was, indeed, one of the most able soldiers in Europe; a contemporary and rival of Moreau, Hoche, Kleber, and Desaix, he had commanded successfully a wing of the Army of the Rhine at a time when Oudinot was colonel, or at most major-general. I never knew anyone handle troops in battle better than Saint-Cyr. He was the son of a small landowner at Toul, and had studied for a civil engineer; but, disliking this profession, he became an actor in Paris, and it was he who created the famous part of Robert, the brigand chief, at the *Théâtre de la Cité*. The revolution of 1789 found him in this position; he entered a volunteer battalion, showed talent and much courage, and very quickly rose to the rank of lieutenant-general, and distinguished himself by many

successes. He was of tall stature, but looked more like a professor than a soldier, which may perhaps be ascribed to the habit which, like the other generals of the Army of the Rhine, he had acquired of wearing neither uniform nor epaulettes, but a plain blue overcoat. It was impossible to find a calmer man; the greatest danger, disappointments, successes, defeats, were alike unable to move him. In presence of every sort of contingency he was like ice. It may be easily understood of what advantage such a character, backed by a taste for study and meditation, was to a general officer. But Saint-Cyr had serious faults as well: he was jealous of his colleagues, and was often seen to keep his troops inactive when other divisions were being shattered close to him. Then he would advance, and, profiting by the enemy's weariness, would beat them, seeming thus to have the sole credit of the victory. Further, if he was among the commanders who were best able to handle their troops on the field, he was undoubtedly the one who took least thought for their welfare. He never inquired if his soldiers had food, clothing, or boots, or if their arms were in good condition. He never held a review, never visited the hospitals, did not even ask if there were any. His view was that the colonels ought to see to all that. In a word, he expected that his regiment should be brought into the field all ready to fight, without troubling himself about the means to keep them in good condition. This method of procedure had done Saint-Cyr much harm, and wherever he had served, his troops, while doing justice to his military talents, had disliked him. His colleagues all dreaded having to act with him, and the different successive Governments of France had only employed him from necessity. It was the same with the Emperor; and such was his antipathy for Saint-Cyr that he did not include him in his first creation of marshals, although he had a better record and much greater talent than the majority of those to whom Napoleon gave the baton. Such was the man who had just been placed under Oudinot's command, much to his regret, for he knew that he would be put in the shade by Saint-Cyr's superior ability.

On August 16, the day on which my eldest son Alfred[1] was born, the Russian army, more than 60,000 strong, attacked Oudinot, who, with Saint-Cyr's Bavarians, had 52,000 men at his disposal. In any ordinary war an engagement in which 112,000 men took part would have been called a battle, and its decision would have had important results; but in 1812, amid belligerent forces amounting to 600,000 or 700,000 men, the meeting of 100,000 only reckoned as a combat. At any rate this is the name given to the affair between Oudinot and the Russians under the walls of Polotsk. This town, which stands on the left bank of the Dwina, is surrounded with ancient earthworks. Before the principal front of the place, the fields, in which vegetables are grown, are cut up by an infinite number of little water-courses; obstacles which, though not exactly impassable for guns and cavalry, hamper their march a good deal. These market-gardens extend to some half a league before the town; but to their left, along the bank of the Dwina, is a vast stretch of meadow, level as a carpet. That was the side by which the Russian general should have attacked Polotsk. He would thus have become master of the single weak bridge of boats affording us our only communication with the left bank, whence we drew our supplies of ammunition and provisions. But Wittgenstein preferred to take the bull by the horns, and directed his main body towards the gardens, hoping to be able from thence to carry the place by escalade; the ramparts being, in fact, nothing but slopes easy to ascend, though commanding a distant view. The attack was smartly delivered; but our infantry defended the gardens bravely, while from the top of the ramparts our artillery, including the fourteen guns captured at Sivoshina, did terrible execution in the enemy's ranks. The Russians retired in disorder to re-form in the plain; and Oudinot, instead of maintaining his good position, pursued them, and was in his turn repulsed. Thus a great part of the day passed; the Russians returning incessantly to the attack, and the French always driving them

[1] Baron Alfred de Marbot was *Maître des Requêtes* to the Council of State. He died 1865.

back beyond the gardens. While the slaughter thus swayed to and fro Saint-Cyr followed Oudinot in silence; and whenever his opinion was asked he merely bowed and said: 'My lord marshal!' as though he would say: 'As they have made you a marshal, you must know more about the matter than a mere general like me; get out of it as best you can.'

Meanwhile Wittgenstein was losing enormously; and, despairing of success by continuing to attack on the side of the gardens, he ended where he should have begun, and marched the bulk of his troops towards the meadows on the bank of the Dwina. So far, Oudinot had kept his twelve-pounders and all his cavalry at this point, and they had taken no part in the fighting; but now General Dulauloy of the artillery, fearing for his guns, came and proposed to the marshal to retire across the river not only the heavier pieces, but also the cavalry, under the plea that they would be in the way of the infantry movements. Oudinot asked Saint-Cyr what he thought; but instead of giving the good advice to employ the artillery and cavalry on ground where they could easily manœuvre in support of the infantry, he replied with his eternal 'My lord marshal!' Finally, in defiance of the remarks of General Laurencez, his chief of staff, Oudinot ordered both arms to withdraw across the river.

This deplorable movement, which seemed to herald the total abandonment of Polotsk and the right bank, was infinitely displeasing to the troops who were removed, and affected the tone of the infantry, who would have to defend the side of the town towards the meadows; while, on the other hand, the sight of ten cavalry regiments and several batteries leaving the field was a great stimulus to the Russians. Then, to carry disorder into this huge retreating mass, they promptly brought up their 'unicorns,' the projectiles of which, being hollow, acted like round-shot, and then burst like shells. The regiments near mine had several men killed and wounded. I was fortunate enough to have none of my troopers touched, and only lost a few horses. The one which I was riding had his head smashed, and in the fall my wounded shoulder came heavily on the ground, causing

me frightful pain. A trifle less slew in laying the Russian gun, the shot would have struck me full in the body, and my son would have been orphaned a few hours before his birth.

The enemy had now renewed the combat, and when we had crossed the bridge and turned our heads to see what was taking place on the bank we had left we witnessed a most affecting sight. The French infantry, with the Bavarians and the Croats, were fighting bravely, and having the best of it; but the Portuguese legion and the Swiss were flying before the Russians, and did not halt till they were knee-deep in the river. There, compelled to face the enemy or be drowned, they fought at last, and by a well-sustained file fire, forced the Russians to give ground somewhat. The French artillery commander, who had just crossed the Dwina, cleverly seized the moment to be of service. Bringing his guns to the bank, and firing over the river, he smote the enemy's battalions on the other side. This powerful diversion stopped Wittgenstein in this quarter, and as the French, Bavarians, and Croats were elsewhere repulsing him, the fighting slackened, and for the last hour of the day degenerated into sharpshooting. But Marshal Oudinot could not hide from himself that he would have to begin again next day. Full of thought over a state of things of which he could not see the issue, and brought up at every turn by Saint-Cyr's obstinate refusal to speak, he was riding along at a walk, followed by a single aide-de-camp, among his infantry skirmishers, when the enemy's marksmen, noticing the horseman with white plumes, made him their target, and sent a bullet into his arm.

The marshal at once sent word to Saint-Cyr that he was wounded, and handed the command over to him. Leaving to him the task of getting things straight, he left the field, crossed the bridge, and, leaving the army, retired to Lithuania to get his hurt tended. It was two months before we saw him again.

CHAPTER XXVI

SAINT-CYR seized the reins of command with a firm and capable hand, and in a few hours the aspect of things changed entirely—so great is the influence of an able man who knows how to inspire confidence. Marshal Oudinot had left the army in a most alarming situation—part of the troops with the river at their backs, others scattered about beyond the gardens, and keeping up a disorderly fire; the ramparts badly furnished with guns; the streets of the town blocked with caissons, baggage wagons, and wounded, heaped together pell-mell; lastly, the troops had in case of defeat no other way of retreat than by the bridge of boats, which was very narrow, and six inches deep in water. Night was coming on, and the regiments of the different nations were so out of hand that it was quite possible for the sharpshooting to bring on a general action, which might be fatal to us.

General Saint-Cyr's first act was to call in the skirmishers. He was certain that the tired enemy would follow his example as soon as they were no longer attacked; and in fact the fire soon ceased on both sides. The troops could concentrate and take some rest, and business seemed to be put off until the next day. So that he might be in a position to engage with best chances of success, Saint-Cyr took advantage of the night to make his arrangements for repulsing the enemy, or securing his retreat in the event of a reverse. To this end he assembled the regimental commanders, and after having explained the dangers of the situation, the most serious of which was the crowded state of the town and of the approaches to the bridge, he gave orders that the colonels, with other officers and patrols, should go through the streets directing all the uninjured soldiers of their regiments to

the bivouacs, and sending the sick and wounded and all led horses and wagons across the bridge. He added that at break of day he would go round the town and suspend any colonel who had not carried out his orders. No excuse would be accepted. The orders were quickly carried out, and all that was not required for the fight—all the impedimenta of the army, in short—was collected on the left bank. Soon the ramparts and streets, as well as the bridge, were completely clear. The bridge was strengthened, the cavalry and artillery brought back to the right bank and established in the suburb furthest from the enemy. Finally, to facilitate his means of retreat, the prudent commander-in-chief had a second bridge, to be used only by infantry, constructed out of empty barrels and planks. All these preparations were finished before daylight, and the army awaited the enemy with confidence. But he remained inert in his bivouacs on the plain along the edge of the vast forest which surrounds Polotsk on the side away from the river. General Saint-Cyr, who had expected to be attacked in the early morning, ascribed the tranquillity in the Russian camp to their enormous loss on the previous day. This might have had something to do with it, but the principal cause of Wittgenstein's inaction arose from the fact that he was expecting a strong division of infantry and several squadrons from St. Petersburg by the next night, and had put off his attack till this reinforcement arrived, so that he might vanquish us with more ease on the morrow.

Although the great Polish landowners in the neighbourhood of Polotsk did not venture, for fear of compromising themselves with the Russians, to take sides openly with the French, they helped us in secret, and made no difficulty about finding us spies. General Saint-Cyr, in his anxiety as to the enemy's preparations, had asked one of these nobles to send him one of his most intelligent serfs. He sent several wagons of forage to the Russian bivouac, and among the wagoners placed his bailiff, dressed as a peasant. This person, a man of intelligence, chatted with Wittgenstein's soldiers, and learnt that a large body of troops was expected. He even witnessed the arrival of the Cossacks of

the Guard, and of a squadron of 'gentlemen-guards,' and was told that several battalions would reach the camp towards midnight. Having got this information, the bailiff reported it to his master, who lost no time in imparting it to the French commander-in-chief. On receiving this news Saint-Cyr resolved to beat Wittgenstein before the reinforcements came up; but as he did not wish to enter upon too long an engagement, he warned the generals and colonels that he should not attack till six in the evening, so that night should set a term to the fighting, and that in case the Russians were successful they should not have time to follow it up. It is true that in the event of our getting the best of the fight we should be unable to pursue the enemy in the darkness, but this was not Saint-Cyr's purpose. He desired for the moment merely to give them a good lesson, and make them move further away from Polotsk. Wishing to act by way of surprise, he gave orders that the most perfect quiet should be maintained in the town, and along the whole line of outposts.

We found the day very long: everyone, even the commander-in-chief, for all his coolness, had his watch constantly in his hand. Having noticed the day before that the retirement of the French cavalry had allowed the Russians to push our left wing back into the Dwina, General Saint-Cyr brought all his squadrons quietly, a moment before the attack, behind some large stone houses, beyond which the meadows began. On this level ground the cavalry were to act, charging the enemy's right and covering the left of our infantry, the two first divisions of which were to attack the Russian camp, while the third supported the cavalry, and the two last formed the reserve and guarded the town. All was ready when, at six in the evening, the general signal for the attack was given by cannon-shot. This was followed by the thunder of all the French artillery, the projectiles of which fell upon the outposts, even upon the camp of the enemy. Instantly our two leading divisions, the 26th Light Infantry in front, dashed upon the Russian regiments posted in the gardens, killed and captured all whom they could reach, and, putting the others

to flight, pursued them to the camp, where they made many prisoners and captured several guns. The surprise, although in broad daylight, was so complete that General Wittgenstein was quietly dining in a small country house contiguous to his camp when he was warned that the French voltigeurs were in the courtyard. Jumping out of window, he found a Cossack pony at hand, got on its back, and fled with all speed to his main body. Our men took possession of the Russian general's horses, his papers, his wagons, and his wine, as well as his plate and the dinner on the table. Immense booty was also taken in the camp by other companies.

At the uproar of this unexpected attack panic seized the enemy. They fled in most cases without thinking of taking their arms. The disorder was complete, and meanwhile the approach of our infantry divisions was announced by a brisk fire, and the sound of drums beating the charge. Everything pointed to an immense success for the French troops, at whose head was marching Saint-Cyr, calm as usual. But in war an unforeseen and often unimportant incident changes the aspect of affairs. A great number of the enemy's soldiers had reached the rear of the camp in their flight. There was bivouacking the squadron of the 'gentlemen-guards,' which had arrived only a few hours back. This force, composed of young men selected from the noblest families, was commanded by a major of tried courage, whose ardour, it was said, had recently been increased by copious libations. As soon as he learnt what was going on this officer mounted his horse, and, followed by 120 cavaliers, dashed upon the French. The first of our battalions whom he attacked belonged to the 26th. It offered a vigorous resistance, and the guards, repulsed with loss, were trying to rally to charge a second time in line, when their major, impatient at the time which it takes for horsemen in disorder to recover their ranks, left the French battalion, which he could not break, and, ordering his men to follow him, launched them at full speed in loose order through the camp. He found it full of our allies, Portuguese, Swiss, and Bavarian infantry, some of whom, scattered by the very effect of their victory, were

seeking to reassemble, while others were collecting the plunder which the Russians had abandoned. Of these, the guards killed and wounded a good many, until they began to retreat, at first in disorder, soon even in panic-stricken flight. In such cases soldiers take all of their own side who are running up to join them for the enemy; and in a cloud of dust the number of the pursuers, often only a handful of men, appears immense. This was what happened here. The 'gentlemen-guards' scattered over a wide space, and always coming on without looking behind them, looked to the fugitives like a huge body of cavalry; so that the disorder spread until it reached a Swiss battalion in the midst of which General Saint-Cyr had taken refuge, and by the pressure of the crowd he and his horse were overturned into a ditch. In his plain blue overcoat, with no mark of his rank, the general lay prostrate on the ground, and made no movement when the guards drew near, and they, thinking him dead, or taking him for some non-combatant official, passed on over the plain in pursuit. There is no knowing where the disorder would have stayed had not General Berckheim, with equal boldness and good sense, hurried up at the head of the 4th Cuirassiers and charged the Russian horsemen. They defended themselves bravely, but were nearly all killed or taken, their valiant major being among the slain. If the charge executed by this handful of men had been properly supported it would have been very effective; and this fine feat of arms performed by the 'gentlemen-guards' proved afresh that an attack by cavalry has the best chance of success when it is unexpected.

General Saint-Cyr, having been picked up by our cuirassiers, at once ordered all his infantry divisions forward, and attacked the Russians before they had recovered from their disorder. Success was not for a moment doubtful—the enemy were beaten with the loss of many men and guns. While this infantry action was taking place before Polotsk, the fortunes of the left wing of our army in the meadows along the Dwina were as follows. As soon as the first cannon-shot gave the signal for action, our cavalry regiments, headed by Castex's brigade, moved rapidly to meet the

enemy's squadrons which were advancing on us. A serious engagement appeared imminent, and General Castex kindly remarked to me that though I had been able, in spite of my wound, to command my regiment at Sivoshina and the Svolna, when I only had to face infantry and artillery fire, it did not follow that I could do so now, when we should be engaged with cavalry. I might find myself involved in a charge without the means of defending myself, since, as I could only use one arm, I could not hold both sabre and bridle; and he advised me, therefore, to stay for the moment with the infantry division posted in reserve. I felt that I could not accept this good-natured offer, and expressed so strongly my objection to being away from the regiment that the general yielded; but he had six of the bravest troopers placed close in rear of me, commanded by the intrepid Sergeant Prud'homme. Further, I had beside me the two adjutants, the regimental staff-sergeants, a trumpeter, and Fousse, my orderly, one of the best men in the regiment. Thus surrounded, and riding in front of the centre of a squadron, I was pretty well protected, and in the case of urgent necessity I could drop my reins and take up my sword, which hung to my wrist by its knot.

The meadow being large enough to hold two regiments in line, the 23rd and 24th formed the first line, General Corbineau's brigade, consisting of three regiments, forming the second, and the cuirassiers following as reserve. The 24th, which was on the left, had in front of it a regiment of Russian dragoons; my regiment was facing Cossacks of the guard, known by their red coats and the beauty of their horses. These, though they had arrived only a few hours before, seemed in no way fatigued. We advanced at a gallop, and as soon as we were within striking distance General Castex gave the word to charge. His brigade fell upon the Russians, and at the first shock the 24th broke the dragoons opposed to them. My regiment met with more resistance from the Cossacks, picked men of large stature, and armed with lances fourteen feet long, which they held very straight. I had some men killed, a good many wounded;

but when, at length, my troopers had pierced the bristling line of steel, all the advantage was on our side. In a cavalry fight the length of lances is a drawback when their bearers have lost their order and are pressed closely by adversaries armed with swords which they can handle easily, while the lancers find it difficult to present the point of their poles. So the Cossacks were constrained to show their backs, and then my troopers did great execution and took many excellent horses.

As we were about to follow up our success our attention was drawn by a great uproar to our right, and we saw the plain covered with fugitives; it was just then that the 'gentlemen-guards' were making their vigorous charge. General Castex, deeming it unwise to advance further while our centre seemed to be retreating in confusion, ordered the recall to be sounded, and the brigade halted. But it had hardly re-formed, when the Cossacks, emboldened by what was taking place on the centre, and anxious to avenge their first defeat, returned to the charge and dashed madly on my squadrons, while the Grodno Hussars attacked the 24th. Repulsed at all points by Castex's brigade, the Russians brought up in succession their second and third lines, while General Corbineau supported us with the 7th and 20th Chasseurs and the 8th Lancers. A grand cavalry engagement ensued, in which each side experienced varying fortunes. Our cuirassiers were just coming up to take part in it, and the Russian cuirassiers were advancing also, when Wittgenstein, seeing that his infantry was beaten and hard pressed by ours, ordered his cavalry to retire; but it was too closely engaged to be able to effect a retreat easily. Indeed, Generals Castex and Corbineau, sure of support from the cuirassiers, were launching their brigades alternately at the Russian cavalry, who were being thrown into great disorder and losing heavily. General Saint-Cyr, having got beyond the forest, where our victorious divisions of infantry and cavalry were collected, and seeing that night was coming on, stopped the pursuit, and the troops returned to Polotsk and regained the bivouacs which they had left a few hours before.

During this bustling cavalry action my wound had caused me severe pain, especially when I had to put my horse into a gallop. My inability to defend myself often put me into a very awkward position, from which I should not have escaped had I not been surrounded by a group of brave men who never let me out of their sight. One time, when I was pushed by the combatants on to a section of Cossacks, I was obliged, in self-defence, to let go my reins and take my sword. However, I had no need to use it, for the men of every rank who escorted me, seeing their commander in danger, furiously attacked the Cossacks by whom I was surrounded, made many of them bite the dust, and put the rest to flight. My orderly, Fousse, killed three; Adjutant Joly, two. I returned, therefore, from this great fight safe and sound. I had wished to be present at it in person in order to put still more dash into my regiment, and to show that, so long as I could sit on my horse, I felt bound in honour to command it in the hour of danger. Officers and men were much pleased with my devotion, and, as you will see later when I come to speak of the disasters of the great retreat, the liking they had for me increased.

When cavalry meets cavalry the slaughter is much less than when it is opposed to infantry. Moreover, the Russian troopers are generally awkward in handling their weapons, and their leaders not very competent in handling their men.[1] Thus, although at Polotsk my regiment had to do with the Cossacks of the Guard, reputed among the best troops in the Russian service, its losses were not heavy. I had eight or nine killed and some thirty wounded, but among the latter was Major Fontaine. This excellent and valiant officer was in the thick of the scuffle when his horse was killed. He was trying with the help of some of the men to get his feet disentangled from the stirrups, when a confounded Cossack officer, galloping into the middle of the group, leant dexterously over, and aimed a terrible blow at Fontaine, destroying his left eye, injuring the other, and splitting his nose. As, however, the Russian officer was going off, proud of his exploit, one of

[1] English readers will remember the heavy cavalry action at Balaclava.]

our men broke his back with a pistol-shot at six paces' distance, and thus avenged his major. I had M. Fontaine attended to as soon as possible, and he was placed in the Jesuit convent at Polotsk. Visiting him that evening, I was much struck with the brave soldier's resignation. With an eye quite destroyed, he was patiently enduring all the pain and inconveniences resulting from the almost total loss of sight. He was never again fit for active service, which was a great loss to the 23rd Chasseurs. He had belonged to the regiment since its formation, universally loved and esteemed, and I could sympathise with its loss. Left as I was, the only field-officer in the regiment, I had to see to the duties of all, which was a heavy task.

You will think that I have described too much in detail the various actions in which the 2nd corps was concerned; but I repeat what I have said before, that I enjoy the reminiscences of the great wars in which I took part, and I speak of them with pleasure. I seem to be in the field, in the midst of my gallant companions, most of whom, alas! have now left this world.

But to return to the Russian campaign. Anyone but Saint-Cyr, after such heavy fighting, would have reviewed his troops, complimented them on their courage, and inquired into their wants; but that was not his way. The last shot had hardly been fired when Saint-Cyr went and shut himself in the Jesuit convent, where he spent all his days and part of his nights in—what do you suppose? Playing the fiddle! This was his master passion, and nothing but the necessity of marching against the enemy could draw him from it. He left the task of placing the troops to Generals Laurencez and Wrede, who posted two divisions of infantry and the cuirassiers on the left bank of the Dwina. The third French and the two Bavarian divisions remained at Polotsk, where they were set to throw up a vast entrenched camp to serve as a base for the troops, who from this important point covered the left and rear of the Grand Army in its march towards Smolensk and Moscow. Corbineau's and Castex's brigades of light cavalry were placed two leagues in advance of the

great camp, on the left bank of the Polota, a small stream which joins the Dwina at Polotsk. My regiment was to bivouac near a village called Luchonski, the colonel of the 24th fixing himself a quarter of a league in rear of us. We stayed there two months, during the first of which we never went far away.

On hearing of Saint-Cyr's victory the Emperor sent him his marshal's baton. But instead of visiting his troops, the new marshal lived, if possible, more apart than ever. No one could approach the commander-in-chief, whence the soldiers nicknamed him 'the owl.' The numerous rooms of the convent would have been of great service for the wounded, but he would live there alone, and thought he had conceded a great deal when he allowed wounded field-officers to be put in the out-buildings. Even they were only allowed to remain forty-eight hours, after which they had to be moved into the town. The cellars were overflowing with provisions, but the marshal kept the keys, and not even the hospitals could get anything. I had much trouble in getting two bottles of wine for Major Fontaine. Strange to say, Saint-Cyr was most abstemious, and used scarcely any of the stores for himself. Two months later, when the French had to leave the place, after setting town and convent on fire, all these provisions, which the marshal would not distribute, became the prey of the Russians or of the flames.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHILE the events which I have just been recording had been taking place before Polotsk, the Emperor had stayed at Witebsk and thence was directing the operations of his numerous army corps. Some military writers have blamed Napoleon for losing his time first at Wilna, where he stayed nineteen days, and then at Witebsk, where he passed seventeen; asserting that these thirty-six days might have been better employed, especially in a country where the summer is very short, and the rigours of winter begin to be felt by the end of September. The blame seems to be well founded up to a certain point; but some extenuation may be found, first, in the hope which the Emperor had of seeing the Russians seek an understanding; secondly, by the necessity of concentrating the various corps which had been detached in pursuit of Bagration; and, lastly, because some rest had to be granted to the troops. In addition to their day's march they had every evening to go and seek provisions far from their bivouacs, since the Russians as they retired had burnt all stores, and it was impossible to distribute rations regularly to the French troops. Davout's corps was, however, for a long time a fortunate exception to this rule, since that marshal, who was no less great as an administrator than as a leader, had organised before the passage of the Niemen huge trains of small carts to follow his army. These carts, filled with biscuits, salted meat, and vegetables, were drawn by oxen, a certain number of which were slaughtered every evening. This, while assuring a supply of provisions, had a great effect in keeping the soldiers in their ranks.

The Emperor left Witebsk August 13, and, placing the 2nd and 6th corps under the command of Saint-Cyr at

Polotsk, he moved to Krasnoe, where part of the Grand Army was assembled in presence of the enemy. A battle was expected, but only a slight engagement took place with the Russian rear-guard, who were beaten and retreated nimbly. On the 15th, his *fête* day, the Emperor held a march past of the troops, who greeted him with enthusiasm. Next day the army came in sight of Smolensk, called by the Russians 'the holy,' since they regard it as the key of Moscow and the palladium of their Empire. Ancient prophecies predicted great misfortunes to Russia whensoever she let Smolensk be taken. This superstition, studiously fostered by the Government, dates from the time when the town marked the extreme frontier of the Muscovites.

King Murat and Marshal Ney were the first to arrive before Smolensk, and thought, for some reason which did not appear, that the enemy had abandoned the place. Their reports to the Emperor having made him adopt the same opinion, he gave orders for the advance-guard to be marched into the town. Ney, in his impatience, awaited no further orders. He advanced towards the gate with a feeble escort of hussars, when suddenly a regiment of Cossacks, masked by a fold in the ground and a thicket, dashed upon our troopers, drove them back, and surrounded Marshal Ney, who was so close pressed that a pistol-bullet fired almost point-blank tore his coat collar. Luckily, Domanget's brigade came up and relieved the marshal, and the arrival of General Razout's infantry permitted Ney to approach near enough to the town to convince himself that the Russians purposed to defend it.

Seeing that the ramparts were armed with a great number of guns, General Eblé of the artillery, a most able man, advised the Emperor to turn the place, by sending Prince Poniatowski's Polish corps to cross the Dnieper two leagues further up. But Napoleon, following the opinion of Ney, who assured him that Smolensk would be easily carried, gave the order to attack. Thereupon the corps of Davout, Ney, and Poniatowski made for the place from different sides. A murderous fire was opened from the ramparts, and this was not equal to that which came from the batteries on the

high ground of the further bank. A sanguinary combat took place. Our troops were decimated by round-shot, grape, and shells, while our artillery could make no impression on the walls. At length, as night came on, the enemy, after disputing the ground valiantly foot by foot, was pushed back into Smolensk, and made ready to abandon it. But as they withdrew they set it on fire in various quarters, and thus the Emperor saw his hopes of taking a town which he had every reason to suppose was full of provisions vanish. Not till daybreak on the next morning did the French enter the place, the streets of which were heaped with corpses and smoking ruins. The capture of Smolensk had cost us 12,000 men, killed and wounded; and this huge loss we might have avoided by crossing the Dnieper, as General Eblé proposed, further up, for in that case General Barclay de Tolly would have had to evacuate the place and retreat towards Moscow on pain of being cut off. After burning the bridge the Russians took up their position for the moment upon the high ground of the right bank, but soon retreated along the road to Moscow. Marshal Ney pursued them with his own corps, strengthened by Gudin's division and Davout's. A short distance from Smolensk he came up with the Russian army at Valutina, engaged in a defile, with all its baggage. The action developed into a real battle, which would have been fatal to the enemy if General Junot, who had accomplished the passage of the Dnieper too slowly at Prondichewo, two leagues above Smolensk, and halted there for forty-eight hours, had marched upon the sound of Ney's guns, only a league away from him. But, though warned by Ney, Junot did not stir. In vain did the Emperor's aide-de-camp, Chabot, bring him an order to join Ney; in vain did Gourgaud repeat the order. Junot remained immovable.

Meanwhile Ney, engaged with infinitely superior forces, had brought all his troops successively into action, and ordered Gudin's division to capture the formidable positions occupied by the Russians. The order was carried out in the most intrepid fashion, but in the very first attack the brave general fell mortally wounded. Yet always maintaining his

wonderful coolness, he wished before he died to assure the success of the troops whom he had so often led to victory, and appointed General Gérard, though he was the junior major-general of the division, to succeed him in the command. Gérard at once placed himself at the head of the division, and by ten o'clock in the evening, after losing 1,800 men and slaying 6,000 of the enemy, he remained in possession of the field of battle, the Russians retiring in haste.

Next day the Emperor came to inspect the troops who had fought so valiantly. He distributed rewards freely, and confirmed Gérard in command of the division. General Gudin died a few hours later.

If Junot had chosen to take part in the fight he could have shut the Russian army into a narrow defile, where it would have been caught between two fires and compelled to lay down its arms, and this would have put an end to the war. Then people regretted King Jerome, who, though a poor general, would probably have come to the assistance of Ney, and everyone expected to see Junot severely punished. But he was the first officer in whom Napoleon had inspired a personal attachment, and he had followed him in every campaign from Toulon to Russia; the Emperor liked him and forgave him—a misfortune, for it was becoming necessary to make an example.

As soon as the capture of Smolensk was known in Russia a universal outcry arose against General Barclay de Tolly. He was a German; the nation accused him of not conducting the war with sufficient vigour, and demanded a Muscovite general to defend the ancient Muscovy. The Emperor Alexander was forced to give way, and conferred the command in chief of all his armies on General Kutusoff; he was past his prime and a man of little ability, best known for having been defeated at Austerlitz. But he had the merit, in the circumstances a great one, of being a Russian of the old stock; which gave him much influence, both over the troops and over the mass of the people.

The French advance-guard, always pushing the enemy

before it, had passed Dorogobush before the Emperor made up his mind to leave Smolensk. It was oppressively hot; they had to march on shifting sands; and the supply of food was insufficient for such a mighty assemblage of men and horses, for the Russians had left nothing behind them but burnt villages and farms. When the army entered Wiazma that pretty town was in flames, and so with Ghiat. The nearer they drew to Moscow the scantier grew the resources of the country. Men, and especially horses, began to die. In a few days cold rain succeeded the intolerable heat, and continued till September 4; autumn was coming on. The army was not more than six leagues from Mojaisk, the last town left to take before reaching Moscow, when a considerable increase was perceived in the strength of the enemy's rear-guard, and there was every sign that a great battle was at last going to be fought. On the 5th our advance was checked for a moment by a powerful Russian column strongly intrenched on a rising ground garnished with twelve guns. The 57th of the line, which in the Italian days the Emperor had surnamed 'The Terrible,' bravely maintained its reputation by capturing the enemy's redoubt and artillery. They were now on the ground where forty-eight hours later took place the battle which the Russians call *Borodino*, the French *la Moskova*.

On September 6 the Emperor issued a general order announcing a battle for the morrow. The army joyfully awaited the great day which was to end its misery, for the troops had received no rations for a month, each man living how he could. The final arrangements were made on both sides. For the Russians, Bagration commanded the left wing, 62,000 men; in the centre was the hetman Platoff, with his Cossacks, and 30,000 infantry in reserve; the right, consisting of 70,000 men, was under Barclay de Tolly, who, having been deposed from the chief command, had taken a secondary place. Kutusoff was commander-in-chief. To oppose his 162,000 men the Emperor Napoleon had barely 140,000 at his disposal. They were thus distributed:

Eugène commanded the left, Davout the right, Ney the centre, Murat the cavalry, the guard was in reserve.

The battle was fought on September 7. The weather was overcast, and a cold wind raised clouds of dust. The Emperor, suffering terribly from headache, descended towards a kind of ravine, where he passed the greater part of the day in pacing about. From this spot he could see only a portion of the field, and to command the whole of it he had to ascend a neighbouring hillock. This he did only twice during the battle, and he has been reproached with inaction; but it must be remarked that at the point where he was with the reserve he was in a position to receive frequent reports as to what was taking place all along the line; while if he had been always going from one wing to another over ground so broken, the aides-de-camp bringing important intelligence would not have known where to find him. It must be remembered, too, that he was unwell, and the icy wind, blowing with great force, prevented him from staying on horseback.

As I was not present at the battle of the Moskwa I refrain from entering into details of the manœuvres, and merely say that, after unparalleled efforts, the French obtained a victory over the Russians, whose resistance was most obstinate. Naturally, the battle reckons as one of the most bloody of this age. The losses of the two armies were calculated at 50,000. The French lost forty-nine generals, killed and wounded, and had 20,000 men disabled. The Russian loss was greater by a third. General Bagration, their best officer, was killed, and, by a strange chance, the ground on which the battle was fought was his property. The French took very few prisoners—a proof of the valour with which the vanquished fought.

Several interesting episodes occurred during the action. Thus, when the Russian left, twice broken by the efforts of Murat, Davout, and Ney, and rallying as often, was coming a third time to the charge, Murat sent General Belliard to the Emperor with a request that he would send part of his guard to complete the victory, as otherwise it would take a second battle to beat the Russians. Napoleon was

inclined to comply with this request; but Marshal Bessières, who commanded the guard, said, 'Allow me to point out that your Majesty is at this moment seven hundred leagues from France.' Whether this remark decided the Emperor, or he did not think the battle sufficiently developed to employ his reserve, he refused to do so. Two similar requests met with the same answer.

One of the most remarkable feats performed in this battle, so fertile of brave actions, was the following. The front of the enemy's line was covered by high ground, provided with redoubts, redans, and, above all, a loopholed fort armed with eighty guns. The French, after heavy loss, had carried all these works, but had been unable to hold their ground in the fort. General Montbrun, commanding the 2nd cavalry corps, observed by the aid of his telescope that the fort was not closed at the gorge, and that the Russian troops were entering by sections; while it was possible, by turning the high ground, to avoid the ramparts and the rocks, and bring the squadrons up to the gate by gently sloping ground practicable for horses. Accordingly, he proposed to enter the fort in rear with his cavalry, while the infantry attacked it in front. This daring suggestion was approved by Murat and the Emperor, and its execution entrusted to Montbrun. But while that fearless general was preparing for action he was killed by a cannon-ball—a great loss for the army—and the Emperor sent General Caulaincourt, brother to the grand equerry, to take his place. Then was seen something unprecedented in the annals of war: a fort defended by many guns and several battalions, attacked and captured by a cavalry column. Caulaincourt, hastening on with a division of cuirassiers, the 5th regiment, under Colonel Christophe, leading, reached the entrance, made his way inside, and fell with a bullet through his head. Colonel Christophe and his cuirassiers avenged their general by putting part of the garrison to the sword. The fort remained in their hands, and the victory of the French was assured. In these days, with their insatiable thirst for promotion, people would be astonished if, after so fine a feat of

arms, a colonel were not promoted. But under the Empire ambition was held in check; Christophe did not become a general for several years, and never expressed any dissatisfaction at the delay.

Although the Russians had been beaten, and forced to evacuate the field of battle, their commander-in-chief, Kutusoff, had the audacity to write to the Emperor Alexander that he had just won a great victory over the French. This misleading news reached St. Petersburg on the day of Alexander's *fête*, and caused the liveliest joy. *Te Deum* was sung, while Kutusoff was proclaimed the saviour of his country, and created field-marshal. But the truth was soon known, and joy turned to mourning. Still, Kutusoff was a field-marshal, and he desired no more. Any other than the timid Alexander would have severely punished the falsehood; but he could not do without Kutusoff, who therefore remained in command of the army.

The Russians, in their retreat towards Moscow, were overtaken on the morning of the 8th at Mojaisk, and in the cavalry action which ensued General Belliard was wounded. [Napoleon stayed three days at Mojaisk to await despatches. One which had come the day before the battle had done much to cause his indisposition, for it announced the defeat of Marshal Marmont at Salamanca. Marmont was one of Napoleon's mistakes. They had been together at the college of Brienne, where Marmont's schoolboy successes had led the Emperor to credit him with more military talent than his performances justified. When he replaced Masséna in 1811 he gave out that he was going to beat Wellington. He was now vanquished and wounded, and but for General Clausel his army would have lost still more heavily. This catastrophe might have made the Emperor reflect that while he was invading Russia he was losing Spain. Major Fabvier, who brought the despatch, was wounded in the action on the great redoubt—a long way to come in search of a bullet!]

CHAPTER XXVIII

NAPOLEON left Mojaisk on September 12 and entered Moscow on the 15th. The great town was deserted, the governor, General Rostopchin, having made all the inhabitants go out. This Rostopchin, whom some would make a hero, was a barbarian who shrank from no means to make himself notorious. He had allowed a number of foreign traders to be killed by the populace; above all, some French domiciled in Moscow, whose only crime was that they were suspected of wishing for the arrival of Napoleon's troops. Some days before the battle of the Moskwa, the Cossacks having captured a hundred of the French sick, General Kutusoff sent them to the governor of Moscow. Without any pity for their sufferings, he left them without food for forty-eight hours, and then marched them through the streets, where several of the poor wretches died of hunger. Meanwhile the police-agents read a proclamation in which Rostopchin, to encourage the people, said that all the French were equally feeble, and would be as easily knocked over. At the end of this terrible procession the greater part of our soldiers who survived it were butchered by the populace, without any attempt on Rostopchin's part to stop it.

The beaten Russian troops only passed through Moscow, and went on to re-form thirty leagues further, towards Kalouga. King Murat followed them with infantry and cavalry, while the guard remained in the city, and Napoleon established himself in the Kremlin, the ancient palace of the Czars. All was apparently quiet, when, on the night of September 15, the French and German traders who had escaped the governor's search came and warned Napoleon's staff that the town was about to be set on fire. This was

soon confirmed by a Russian police-agent, who could not make up his mind to execute the orders of his chief. He said that before leaving Moscow Rostopchin had set free the prisoners, and distributed to them torches made by English workmen. The incendiaries were in the palace awaiting the signal. The Emperor at once prescribed the most severe measures. The streets were patrolled, and many brigands caught in the act of arson were killed. But it was too late; the fire burst out at different points, and spread all the more rapidly that Rostopchin had had all the pumps removed; so that in a short time Moscow was one fiery furnace. The Emperor left the Kremlin, and took refuge in the château of Peterskoe; only returned three days later, when the fire was beginning to burn itself out. I shall not enter into any details of the burning of Moscow, as the story has been told by several eye-witnesses, but will discuss later on the effects of this enormous catastrophe.

Napoleon, misconceiving Alexander's situation, was always in hope of his coming to terms. At length, tired of waiting, he decided to write to him. Meanwhile the Russian army was being reorganised in the direction of Kalouga, whence its commander sent officers towards Moscow to bring back to their regiments the stragglers, who were estimated at 15,000. These men had retired to the suburbs, and went about freely among our bivouacs, sitting at our soldiers' fires, and eating with them, without its occurring to anyone to make them prisoners. This was a mistake, for they gradually rejoined their army, while ours was growing weaker every day from sickness and the effects of the first cold weather. Our loss in horses, owing to the immense labour which Murat had through-

[1] M. de Ségur writes: 'There was no longer any concealment of the fate to which Moscow was doomed. At night emissaries knocked at all the doors announcing the fire. The pumps had been removed, and none knew what to do. That day a terrible scene ended the sad drama. The prisons opened, and a filthy crowd issued tumultuously. From that day Moscow belonged neither to French nor Russians, but to this foul mob, whose rage was guided by police officers and men. They were organised, and his post assigned to each, and they dispersed, to let fire and pillage burst forth on all sides at once.'

out the campaign imposed on the cavalry, was enormous. Mindful of his brilliant successes against the Prussians in 1806 and 1807, he thought that cavalry could do anything, and march twelve or fifteen leagues a day, the only thing necessary being to bring the heads of his columns in contact with the enemy. But the conditions were much changed by the climate, the difficulty of getting forage, the length of the campaign, and, above all, Russian tenacity. Thus when we arrived at Moscow half the cavalry had no horses, and Murat destroyed the rest in the province of Kalouga. Proud of his stature and his courage, and always bedizened in strange but brilliant costumes, the prince had attracted the notice of the enemy, and liked to parley with them, exchanging presents with the Cossack leaders. Kutusoff took advantage of these meetings to keep up false hopes of peace, which were passed on from Murat to the Emperor. But one day the same enemy who said he was growing weak roused himself, slipped through our cantonments, and walked off with several baggage-trains, a squadron of dragoons of the guard, and a battalion of the line. From that time Napoleon forbade all communication with the Russians except by his authority.

He did not, however, lose all hope of peace. On October 4 he sent General Lauriston to Kutusoff's headquarters. The cunning Russian showed Lauriston a letter from himself to the Emperor Alexander urging him to accept the French proposals, seeing, as he said, that the Russian army was in no state to continue the war. But hardly had the officer bearing this despatch started for St. Petersburg, furnished by Lauriston with a passport to guard him against attack from any of our people who were prowling between the two armies, when Kutusoff sent a second aide-de-camp to his Emperor. Having no French passport he was caught by our patrols, arrested as lawful prize, and his despatches sent to Napoleon. They contained the very opposite of what Kutusoff had shown to Lauriston. In fact, the Russian marshal, after begging his sovereign not to treat with the French, announced that Admiral Tchichagoff's army, having left Wallachia after peace made with the Turks, was advancing on Minsk to cut

off Napoleon's retreat. He further informed Alexander of the conversation which he had been so diligently keeping up with Murat, in order to maintain the French in their mischievous security at Moscow at so advanced a season of the year. At sight of this letter Napoleon, perceiving that he had been tricked, burst into a violent rage, and, it is said, formed a plan of marching on St. Petersburg. But the weakness of his army and the rigours of winter were in the way of that expedition; and, moreover, he had important reasons for wishing to be near Germany, and in a better position for keeping an eye on it and on affairs in France. A conspiracy had broken out in Paris, and for one day its leaders had been in possession of the capital. General Malet, an excitable person, had thrown the spark which might have kindled a blaze; and if he had not been met by a man no less clear-headed than energetic, in the person of Laborde, it might have been all up with the Imperial Government. Even so the incident made a great impression, and Napoleon's grief at learning the danger in which his family and his ministers had been may be imagined.

Meanwhile his position at Moscow was growing daily more serious. The cold was already intense, and only those soldiers who were French by birth retained their spirit. But they were not the half of those whom Napoleon had led into Russia. The rest were Germans, Swiss, Croats, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese. All these foreigners, who remained loyal so long as the army prospered, were beginning to grumble; Russian agents inundated our camps with proclamations in divers languages; and the men began to desert in great numbers under promise that they should be sent home. Besides this, the two wings of the Grand Army, composed solely of Austrians and Prussians, were no longer in line with the centre as when the campaign began, but were in our rear, ready to bar our road at a word from their sovereigns, the ancient and irreconcilable enemies of France. The position was most critical; and, bitter as it was to Napoleon's pride, by withdrawing before he had imposed peace on Alexander, to admit to the whole world that he had missed

the aim of his expedition, the word 'retreat' was at last spoken. Not yet, however, had the Emperor or the marshals or anyone any idea of leaving Russia and recrossing the Niemen; it was only a question of taking up winter quarters in some of the least uncomfortable provinces of Poland.

The evacuation of Moscow was thus practically settled; but, before making up his mind to carry it out, Napoleon, with some last hope of an understanding, sent Caulaincourt, the Duke of Vicenza, to Marshal Kutusoff, but got no reply. During this delay our army was melting away daily, while in blind confidence our outposts were left exposed in the province of Kalouga. Suddenly an unexpected event occurred, to open the eyes of the most incredulous, and destroy any hopes which the Emperor might retain on the subject of peace.

General Sébastiani, whom we saw allowing himself to be surprised at Druia, had replaced Montbrun in the command of the 2nd cavalry corps. Close to the enemy as he was, he passed his days in slippers reading Italian poetry and never reconnoitring. Kutusoff took advantage of this, and on October 18 marched on Sébastiani's corps, surrounded it, overwhelmed it by superior numbers, and compelled it to abandon part of its artillery. The three cavalry divisions only succeeded in rejoining Murat's troops by cutting down several battalions of the enemy who tried in vain to oppose their passage. Sébastiani, who was brave enough, displayed much courage in the fight; but as a general he may be noted for mediocrity. When we come to the campaign of 1813 you will have further proof of it.

Simultaneously with this surprise of Sébastiani, Kutusoff attacked Murat all along his line; and the prince himself was slightly wounded. The Emperor heard of the affair the same day; also that 10,000 cavalry from the army of Wallachia had been permitted by our allies the Austrians to reach the enemy's camp. Thereupon he ordered that the retreat should begin next day.

On the morning of October 19 the Emperor left Moscow. He had entered it on September 15. He himself, with the Old

Guard and the main body of the army, took the road to Kalouga. Marshal Mortier and two divisions of the Young Guard stayed for twenty-four hours in the city to complete its ruin by blowing up the Kremlin, with orders to bring up the rear. The army was followed by more than 40,000 vehicles, which blocked the defiles. When this was remarked to the Emperor he said that each of them would save two wounded, and would feed several men, while they would gradually be got rid of. This philanthropic system seems to me open to objection; for the need of lightening the march of an army in retreat appears to take precedence of all other considerations.

While the French were at Moscow, King Murat and his cavalry had been occupying part of the province of Kalouga, but had not taken the town of that name, the neighbourhood of which is very fertile. The Emperor, wishing to avoid passing the battlefield of the Moskwa, and taking the Mojaisk road, the resources of which the army had already exhausted, took the line of Kalouga. From this he hoped to reach Smolensk through a fertile and unexhausted district. But, after several days' march, our troops, which since Murat had rejoined them, amounted still to over 100,000 men, found themselves in presence of the Russian army, occupying the little town of Malo-Jaroslavitz. The enemy's position was exceedingly strong, but the Emperor none the less ordered Eugène to attack it with the Italian corps and the divisions of Morand and Gérard. Nothing could stay the dash of our troops, and they took the town after a long and murderous engagement, which cost us 4,000 men killed and wounded. General Delzons, a most deserving officer, was among the killed. Next day, October 24, the Emperor, astounded by the brisk resistance by which he had been met, and knowing that the whole Russian army blocked his road, halted his troops, and spent three days in considering what steps he should take.

During a reconnoissance Napoleon was on the verge of being captured by the enemy. It was a thick fog. Suddenly the shouts of 'Hourra! hourra!' were heard, and a number of

Cossacks issued from a wood near the road. They crossed the road twenty paces from the Emperor, overturning and spearing all whom they met as they passed. But General Rapp, dashing forward at the head of two squadrons of chasseurs and mounted grenadiers of the guard, put the enemy to flight. In this fight M. Le Couteulx, my old comrade on Lannes' staff, now Prince Berthier's aide-de-camp, having armed himself with the lance of a Cossack whom he had slain, was imprudent enough to return brandishing the weapon. It was the more imprudent that he had on a furred pelisse and cap, under which the French uniform could not be seen. Accordingly, a grenadier, taking him for a Cossack officer, and seeing him make for the Emperor, pursued him, and ran him through with his gigantic sabre. In spite of this frightful wound Le Couteulx survived both the cold and the fatigues of the retreat, and got back to France, travelling in one of the Emperor's carriages.

Napoleon, having assured himself by reconnoissances that it was impossible to continue his march towards Kalouga, except by fighting a sanguinary battle against Kutusoff's numbers, decided to regain Smolensk by way of Mojaisk. So the army left a fertile region to follow a route which they had devastated and had traversed in September amid blazing villages and heaps of corpses. The nature of the Emperor's movement, which resulted in bringing him, after ten days' hard work, to a point only twelve leagues from Moscow, made the troops very anxious as to the future. The weather became fearful; and after blowing up the Kremlin, Marshal Mortier rejoined the Emperor. Again the army beheld Mojaisk and the battlefield of the Moskwa. The ground was furrowed by cannon-balls and covered with débris of every kind, and 30,000 corpses half-devoured by wolves. The soldiers and the Emperor passed quickly, casting a sad look on this vast charnel-house.

In the first edition of his work on the campaign M. de Ségur says that as they passed the battlefield they saw an unhappy Frenchman, who, having had both his legs smashed in the fight, had packed himself into the body of a dead

horse and had lived there for fifty days, using the flesh of the animal both to feed himself and to dress his wounds. It was pointed out to him that the man would have been stifled by the gases of decomposition, and that he would probably have preferred to cover his wounds with fresh earth, or even with grass, than to make them worse by bringing them into contact with putrid flesh. I only make this remark to put the reader on his guard against the exaggerations of a book the success of which was largely owing to its brilliant style.

Beyond Wiazma the march of the army was delayed by snowstorms and an icy wind. Many of the carriages were left behind, and thousands of men and horses perished from cold; the flesh of the horses supplied food to the soldiers, and even to the officers. The rear-guard passed from the command of Davout to that of Eugène, and finally came under Ney, who discharged this laborious duty for the rest of the campaign. Smolensk was reached on November 1. Napoleon had ordered a great quantity of provisions and clothing to be collected in that town; but the commissaries in charge, knowing nothing of the state of disorganisation into which the army had fallen, would not distribute them without regular orders and the formalities usual under ordinary circumstances. These delays irritated the soldiers, dying as they were of hunger and cold. They broke into the storehouses and possessed themselves of the contents, so that many men got too much, some not enough, others nothing.

So long as the march of the troops was orderly the mixture of different nations had given rise only to slight inconvenience; but when misery and fatigue had broken up the ranks, discipline was at an end. How could it exist in an immense body of isolated individuals lacking everything, going along on their own account, and not understanding each other? A veritable confusion of tongues reigned in that disorderly mass. Some regiments, notably that of the guard, still held out. The troopers of the line regiments had lost nearly all their horses, and were formed into battalions. The officers who still were mounted composed the *sacred* squadrons, the command of which was entrusted to

Generals Latour-Maubourg, Grouchy, and Sébastiani. They did the duties of mere captains, while major-generals and colonels acted as sergeants and corporals. An organisation like this would, of itself, be sufficient to show to what extremities the army was reduced.

The Emperor had reckoned upon a strong division of troops of all arms, which General Baraguey d'Hilliers was to bring to Smolensk; but when they got near the town they learnt that that general had surrendered to a Russian column on the understanding that he alone should not be made prisoner, but be allowed to go and join the French army to explain his conduct. The Emperor, however, would not see him, but ordered him to return to France and consider himself under arrest until he could be tried by court-martial. Baraguey d'Hilliers anticipated their judgment by dying of grief at Berlin. He had been one of Napoleon's mistakes. He had taken his fancy in the days of the Boulogne camp by promising to train the dragoons to serve as infantry or cavalry alike; but this system was tried in Austria during the campaign of 1805, and the veteran dragoons, dismounted and commanded by Baraguey d'Hilliers in person, were beaten at Werthingen under the Emperor's eyes. Their horses were given back to them, but they were beaten again, and for several years this arm felt the disorder into which Baraguey had thrown it. Having fallen into disgrace, he hoped to retrieve himself by asking leave to come to Russia, and there ruined himself finally in the Emperor's favour by capitulating without fighting, and violating the decrees which ordered the commander of a surrendered corps to share the fate of his troops and forbade him to ask for conditions favourable to himself alone.

After several days' halt at Smolensk to allow the stragglers to come up, the Emperor went on the 15th to Krasnoe, and thence sent an officer to the 2nd army corps on the Dwina, in which now his only hope of safety resided. The regiments composing this corps had undergone less fatigue and privation than those which had taken part in the march to Moscow; but, on the other hand, they had

encountered the enemy much more frequently. Napoleon wished to reward them by appointing them to all the vacant posts, and had all the recommendations for promotion brought to him. There were several in my favour, one of which asked only for the rank of *major* (lieutenant-colonel) for me. The secretary happened to present this one, and I have it from General Grundier, who, having been ordered to bring these despatches, was at the moment in the Emperor's room, that Napoleon when signing struck out the word *major* and substituted colonel, remarking, 'I am discharging an old debt.' So at last I became colonel of the 23rd Chasseurs. It was November 15, but I did not hear of it till some time afterwards.

The retreat continued painfully, and the enemy, with ever increasing numbers, separated Prince Eugène's corps from the army, and also those of Davout and Ney. The first two succeeded with much difficulty in cutting their way through and getting back to the Emperor, who was in a state of painful anxiety about Ney's corps, several days having passed without any news of it. On November 19 Napoleon reached Orcha. A month had passed since he had left Moscow, and he was still 120 leagues from the Niemen; the cold was intense.

While the Emperor was agitated by gloomy uncertainty as to the fate of the rear-guard and its intrepid leader, Ney was performing one of the most brilliant feats of arms recorded in military annals. Leaving Smolensk on the 17th after blowing up the ramparts, the marshal had hardly started when he was assailed by myriads of the enemy, who attacked him on both flanks, in front, and in rear. Continually beating them off, Ney marched through their midst for three days; but he found himself checked at length by the dangerous passage of the Krasnoe ravine, beyond which could be seen a strong body of Russian troops, with a formidable artillery, which opened a brisk and well-maintained fire. Undismayed by this unforeseen obstacle, the marshal took the bold resolve of forcing the passage, and ordered the 48th of the line, commanded by Masséna's old aide-de-camp, Colonel Pelet, to

charge with the bayonet. At the sound of Ney's voice the French soldiers, worn out as they were with fatigue and want, and numbed with the cold, dashed forward and carried the Russian batteries. The enemy recovered them, and our troops drove them out again, but they had at last to yield to numbers. The 48th was cut to pieces by grape-shot, and in great part destroyed. Out of 650 men who entered the ravine, 100 only came back, Colonel Pelot, severely wounded, being of the number. Night came on, and all hope of the rear-guard rejoining the army appeared to be lost. But Ney had confidence in his troops, and above all in himself. By his orders numerous lines of fires were kindled so as to hold the enemy in their camp, in fear of a fresh attack on the morrow. The marshal had resolved to place the Dnieper between him and the Russians, and to entrust his destiny and that of his troops to the frail ice of the river. His only doubt was as to the road which he ought to take in order to reach the Dnieper as soon as possible. Just then a Russian colonel, coming from Krasnoe, presented himself as a flag of truce, and summoned Ney to lay down his arms. At the thought of such humiliation the marshal's anger burst forth, and, as the officer bore no written orders, Ney declared that he did not consider him as a flag of truce, but as a spy, and that he would have him bayoneted if he did not guide them to the nearest point of the Dnieper. The Russian colonel was compelled to obey, and Ney instantly gave orders to leave the camp in silence. Artillery, caissons, baggage, and wounded were abandoned, and, favoured by the darkness, he reached the banks of the Dnieper after four hours' march.

The river was frozen, but not hard enough to be practicable at all points, for there were many cracks and places where the ice was so thin that it gave way when several crossed at once. The marshal therefore made the soldiers cross in single file, and the passage of the river thus accomplished, Marshal Ney's troops deemed themselves in safety. But by the dawning light they perceived a large bivouac of Cossacks. The hetman, Platoff, was in command then, and as, according to his habit, he had been drinking all night, he was at that

moment asleep. Now discipline is so strict in the Russian army, that no one dared to awake the chief, nor stand to arms without his order. The fragments of Ney's corps therefore edged along a league from the hetman's camp without being attacked; nor did they see any more of Platoff's Cossacks till the next day. For three days Marshal Ney marched, fighting incessantly, along the winding banks of the Dnieper, to Orcha, and on the 20th came in sight of the town. He hoped to find the Emperor and the army there; but between him and it there still lay a wide plain, occupied by a strong body of the enemy's infantry, which was advancing on him, the Cossacks, meanwhile, preparing to attack his rear. Taking up a defensible position, he sent several officers, one after another, to make sure that the French were still in Orcha; since otherwise further resistance would be of no avail. One of them reached the place, and found the head-quarters still there. On learning that Ney had returned the Emperor evinced the greatest joy, and in order to deliver him from his dangerous situation he sent Eugène and Mortier to meet him. They repulsed the enemy, and brought Marshal Ney, with what remained of the brave men under his command, back to Orcha. This retreat did Ney the greatest credit.

That day the Emperor continued his retreat by Kokanoff and Toloczin, to Bobra, where he found Marshal Victor's troops lately arrived from Germany, and came into touch with the 2nd corps, the command of which Saint-Cyr had just handed back to Oudinot.

CHAPTER XXIX

As it is important to explain the reasons which had brought the 2nd corps back to the main body of the army, from which it had been separated since the beginning of the campaign, I must resume the summary of its history from the month of August. At that time, after having beaten the Russians before Polotsk, Marshal Saint-Cyr had formed a vast entrenched camp near that place, garrisoning it with some of his troops, and distributing the rest about both banks of the Dwina. The light cavalry covered the cantonments, and, as I have said, Castex's brigade, including my regiment, was placed at Luchonski on the Polota, whence we were able to watch the main roads coming from Sebesh and Nevel. Wittgenstein's army after its defeat had retired behind those towns, so that between the Russians and the French there was a space of more than twenty-five leagues. This was not regularly occupied, but both sides sent cavalry to reconnoitre it, which gave rise to sundry skirmishes. As in the neigbourhood of Polotsk, there was abundant forage, the crops still standing; the soldiers, knowing that we should stay there for some time, set to work to reap and thresh the corn, grinding it afterwards in the little hand-mills, such as are found in every peasant's house. This appeared to me to be slow work, and I caused two water-mills on the Polota to be repaired, from which time my regiment was sure of its bread. As for meat, the woods were full of beasts abandoned by their owners; but since providing ourselves from these meant a daily hunt, I resolved to imitate a practice which I had seen with the Army of Portugal, and to form a regimental herd. I succeeded in a short time in getting together 700 or 800 beasts, putting them under the care of some dismounted

chasseurs, whom I supplied with some of the horses of the country, which were too small to be drafted into the ranks. I increased my herd by frequent raids, and it existed for several months, so that I was able to give the regiment as much meat as they wanted, and keep my troops, who were grateful for my care, in good health. I also looked after the horses, for which large sheds were constructed thatched with straw and placed in rear of the soldiers' huts, so that our bivouac was almost as comfortable as a camp in time of peace. The other colonels made similar arrangements, but none of them collected a herd, their soldiers living from hand to mouth.

While the French, Croat, Swiss, and Portuguese regiments worked unceasingly at improving their position, the Bavarians alone took no steps to escape from sickness and want. In vain did General Wrede try to stimulate their energy by pointing out the activity with which the French soldiers were constructing huts, harvesting, threshing, grinding, and baking; the poor Bavarians, wholly demoralised since they had ceased to receive rations, admired the intelligent work of our troops without trying to imitate them. Thus they died like flies, and not one would have survived if Marshal Saint-Cyr, giving up his habitual indolence for a moment, had not bidden the colonels of the other divisions to supply the Bavarians every day with bread, while the light cavalry fetched cattle for them. Yet these Germans, so slack when it was necessary to work, were brave enough before the enemy, but as soon as the danger was over they relapsed into utter apathy. Home-sickness took possession of them; they crawled to Polotsk, and making for the hospitals, which the care of their chiefs had established, they asked for 'the room where people die,' lay down on the straw, and never got up again. In this way a great number perished, and things came to such a point that General Wrede was obliged to place in his baggage wagon the colours of several battalions which had no longer men enough to guard them. Yet we were in September, and so far the weather was very mild; the other troops were in good condition and lived merrily while awaiting future events. The troopers of my regiment

were especially noticed for their good health, which I attributed in the first place to the quantity of bread and meat which I gave them, and still more to the plentiful supply of spirits which I was able to obtain by an arrangement with the Jesuits of Polotsk. Those kind fathers, all French, had a large farm at Luchonski with a distillery of corn brandy, but on the approach of war the workmen had all fled to the monastery, taking their stills and apparatus, so that the manufacture had stopped, and the brethren had lost part of their income. Meanwhile the assemblage of the army about the town had made alcohol so scarce and so dear that the canteen-men made several days' journey to Wilna to fetch it. It occurred to me then to make a treaty with the Jesuits, under which I was to protect their distillers, and make my soldiers provide the necessary corn, on condition that my regiment should have every day a share of the resulting brandy. My proposal was accepted; the monks derived great profit from the sale of their spirit in the camp, and I was able to serve it out three times a day to my men, who since they crossed the Niemen had drunk nothing but water.

I know that these details seem at first sight superfluous, but I recall them with pleasure, because the care which I took of my men saved the lives of many of them, and kept the effective strength of the 23rd Chasseurs far above that of any other cavalry regiment in the army corps. This gained me a testimony of the Emperor's satisfaction, of which I will speak later on. I took two other precautions which saved the life of many of my troopers: the first was compelling them all to provide themselves with sheepskin-overcoats, such as were to be found in plenty in the deserted villages. Soldiers are big children, and one has to take care of them in spite of themselves. My men declared at first that these greatcoats were useless and overweighted their horses; but by the time that October began they were very glad to put them under their cloaks, and when the great cold came on they thanked me for compelling them to keep them. My second precaution was to send to the rear of the army all troopers who had lost their horses by the enemy's fire, or by breaking down. There

was a general order that all such men were to be sent to Lepel, in Lithuania, where they were to receive horses that were expected from Warsaw. I was preparing to obey this order, when I heard that the depôt at Lepel was choked with dismounted troopers in great want, and having nothing to do, since no remounts had arrived. I therefore took it upon myself to send all my dismounted men direct to Warsaw under the command of Captain Poitevin, who had been wounded. I knew quite well that I was contravening the regulations, but in an immense army transported to such a distance, and placed in such unusual circumstances, it was physically impossible that the administrative staff could attend to the requirements of the troops. It was therefore necessary for a regimental commander often to act on his own responsibility; so General Castex, who could not give me an official authorisation, promised to wink at what was going on, and I continued as far as possible to act on this principle, until the troopers whom I sent to Warsaw gradually amounted to 250. After the campaign I picked them up on the Vistula, all newly clothed, well equipped, and with excellent horses, and they formed a capital reinforcement for the regiment. The dismounted men from other regiments who were collected at Lepel to the number of more than 9,000, overtaken by the retreat of the troops on the way from Moscow, were nearly all taken prisoners or died of cold on the road; yet it would have been easy to have sent them during the summer and autumn to Warsaw, where there were in the depôt plenty of horses only wanting riders.

I had a good month's rest at Luchonski, which helped forward the cure of the wound that I had received in July at Jakobowo. In that camp we were well off from a material point of view, but very uneasy about what was going on in the direction of Moscow, and we very seldom got news from France. At length I received a letter from my dear Angélique, in which she announced that she had given birth to a boy. Great as was my joy it was mingled with sadness, for I was far from my family, and though I did not foresee all the dangers to which I was shortly to be exposed,

I could not hide from myself that there were great obstacles in the way of our meeting again.

Towards the middle of September Marshal Saint-Cyr sent me on a very delicate errand. Its end was twofold: first to find out what the enemy was doing in the neighbourhood of Nevel, and then to return by the shores of Lake Ozerichtchi and speak with Count Lubenski, the greatest noble of the country, and one of the few Poles who were ready to do anything to shake off the Russian yoke.

The Emperor, who, while hesitating to proclaim the restoration of the old Poland, had wished to organise the parts already occupied into departments, had met with much opposition from the nobles to whom he had proposed to entrust the administration of them. However, after the assurances which he had received as to the patriotism of Count Lubenski, he had appointed him prefect of Witebsk. As he lived on an estate lying outside of the districts occupied by the French, it was difficult to get the announcement of his nomination to him, and Napoleon had therefore given orders that a body of light cavalry should be sent his way. The duty of carrying out this task having fallen to me, I picked 300 of the bravest and best-mounted men of my regiment, and, after duly victualling them, departed on September 14 from the camp at Luchonski, leaving there Castex's brigade and the rest of our squadrons. I took Lorenz with me to act as interpreter.

Partisan warfare is dangerous and very laborious. Avoiding high roads; hiding by day in the forest without daring to light a fire; getting food and forage in some hamlet, and going some leagues away to consume it, so as to get the better of the enemy's spies; marching all night, and sometimes towards a point other than that which we were really making for; being for ever on the alert—such was the life which I led from the moment when I was launched with only 300 men into a vast and unknown region, ever getting further from the French and nearer to the Russians, with a chance of meeting strong bodies of them. My position was difficult; but I trusted to my luck and the courage of my troopers, and

advanced steadily, keeping always two or three leagues to one side of the road from Polotsk to Nevel by Tomchino.

I need not relate in detail the incidents of no great interest which befel us; it will suffice to say that, thanks to the good counsel given us by the peasants, who were opposed to the Russians, we went all round the town of Nevel, avoiding the enemy's outposts, and after marching eight days, or rather eight nights, reached Lake Ozerichtchi, on the shores of which stood the handsome château belonging to Count Lubenski. I shall never forget our arrival at that ancient and immense mansion. A lovely autumn evening was lighted up by the moon. The count's family were assembled to celebrate his birthday and rejoice over Napoleon's success at the Moskwa, when the servants ran in announcing that the house was surrounded by soldiers, who had set outposts and sentinels, and were already entering the courtyards. They thought it was the Russian police come to arrest their master. He, being a man of courage, was calmly awaiting his removal to the prisons of St. Petersburg, when one of his sons, having opened a window through curiosity, remarked: 'Those troopers are talking French.' At these words Count Lubenski with his family and servants rushed out of the house. He assembled them under a large portico, and as I mounted the steps came towards me with open arms, exclaiming in tragic tones: 'Welcome, generous Gaul, bringing liberty to my country, so long oppressed! Come, warrior of the great Napoleon, Poland's liberator, let me press thee to my heart!' Not only did the count embrace me; he insisted on the countess, his sons, and daughters doing the same. Then the chaplain, the tutors, the governesses kissed my hand, and the servants touched my knee with their lips. Astonished as I was at the various grades of honour which were rendered me, I received them with all the gravity at my command, and I imagined the scene at an end, when, at a word from the count, all fell prostrate in prayer.

We entered the château, and handing Count Lubenski his appointment as prefect of Witebsk bearing the seal of the Emperor of the French I asked if he accepted it.

'Yes,' he cried vigorously, 'and I am all ready to follow you.' The countess was no less enthusiastic, and it was settled that the count should start with me. I allowed an hour to prepare for the journey, which I need not say that my detachment employed in making a good supper, though in our fear of being suprised they were obliged to eat on horseback. Having taken our leave, we went four leagues further and slept in a forest, where we lay hidden all the next day. On the following night we continued our march; but in order to put the enemy, who might have been surprised at the presence of a French detachment in these regions, off the scent I carefully avoided taking the same road as I had followed when coming, and reached Polotsk in five days by way of Lombrowka, sometimes following paths, sometimes going across country. I was all the more thankful that I had returned by a different road when I learnt from some traders belonging to Nevel that the Russians had sent a regiment of dragoons and 600 Cossacks to look out for me, about the head waters of the Drissa, towards Krasnopoli.

After reporting to Marshal Saint-Cyr, and presenting Count Lubenski to him, I returned to our bivouac at Luchonski, where I found General Castex and the rest of my regiment. My expedition had lasted thirteen days, during which we had incurred much fatigue and some privation, but I brought my people back in good condition. We had not had to fight, for such small bodies of the enemy as we had seen had all taken flight at the sight of us.

During our journey I had been in a position to form an opinion with regard to Count Lubenski. He was a well-educated and able man, patriotic above all things, but his judgment was sometimes led astray by his enthusiasm when it was a question of choosing the means to the reconstitution of Poland. If, however, all his compatriots had shared his ardour, and taken up arms on the coming of the French, Poland might, perhaps, have recovered her independence in 1812; but they remained, with very few exceptions, utterly apathetic.

After leaving Polotsk the count went to take possession

of his prefecture. He did not hold it long, for a month had hardly lasped, when the French army was passing through the province of Witebsk in its retreat. Thus compelled to resign his prefecture and withdraw from the vengeance of the Russians, Count Lubenski took refuge in Galicia, where he had large possessions. He lived there peaceably till 1830, at which time he returned to Russian Poland when it was in arms against the Czar. What befel Count Lubenski during and after this rising I do not know. Several of his compatriots assured me that he retired again to Galicia. He was a great patriot and an excellent man.

A few days after our return to Luchonski I was much surprised at seeing a detachment of thirty troopers of my regiment arrive from France. They came from Mons and had thus crossed Belgium, the Rhine provinces, all Germany, part of Prussia and Poland, and travelled more than 400 leagues under the command of a sergeant; yet not a man had stayed behind, and not a horse was injured. This will serve to show the zealous spirit which animated the 23rd Chasseurs.

About October 12 the 2nd corps, which had been for two months living in abundance and tranquillity at Polotsk and the neighbourhood, had to get ready to take its chance of more fighting. We learnt that Admiral Tchichagoff, commanding the army of Wallachia, having through English mediation, made peace with the Turks, was making for Mohileff with the view of falling on the Emperor's rear, while he was still at Moscow, and still lulling himself with the hope of making a treaty with Alexander. People were astonished that Prince Schwarzenberg, whose duty it was with 30,000 Austrians to watch the army of Wallachia, should have let Tchichagoff pass, but it was no less the fact. Not only had the Austrians omitted to close the way, as they might have done, to the Russians, but they had, instead of following them up, remained quiet in their cantonments in Volhynia. Napoleon had counted too much on the good faith of his father-in-law's ministers and generals, when he entrusted to them the duty of covering the right wing of the

Grand Army. In vain does Count de Ségur seek to palliate the offence of the Austrian Government and Prince Schwarzenberg—their treachery was flagrant and history will brand their conduct.

While the Austrians on our right were opening the way to the Russian army coming from Turkey, the Prussians, who had so imprudently been allowed to form our left wing, were also preparing to make terms with the enemy; and that almost openly, without any concealment from Marshal Macdonald, whom the Emperor had put at their head to keep them to their allegiance. As soon as they learnt that the occupation of Moscow had not led to peace, they foresaw the disasters of the French army, and all their hatred towards us awoke. They did not yet rebel openly, but Marshal Macdonald could not get his orders well obeyed, and the Prussians, who were cantoned near Riga, might at any moment join Wittgenstein's troops and overwhelm the French army encamped near Polotsk. It is clear how difficult Marshal Saint-Cyr's situation became, but this did not disturb him, and with his usual coolness he gave, calmly and clearly, his orders for an obstinate defence. The infantry was concentrated in the town and the entrenched camp, while several more bridges were thrown across the Dwina. The sick and the non-combatants were placed in old Polotsk and Ekimania, fortified positions on the left bank. The marshal, not thinking that he had troops enough to dispute the plain with Wittgenstein, who had just been strongly reinforced from St. Petersburg, deemed it best to keep only five squadrons, and took one from each regiment of light cavalry, while the remainder crossed the river. On October 16 the enemy's scouts appeared before Polotsk. They must have found its appearance much changed on account both of the huge entrenched camp and of the numerous works with which the plain was covered. The largest and strongest of these was a redoubt called La Bavaroise. All those of Wrede's unfortunate soldiers who had not died of home sickness asked leave to defend this redoubt, and did it very valiantly.

The battle began on the 17th and lasted all day. Marshal Saint-Cyr's position could not be forced, and General Wittgenstein, in his anger attributing this check to the fact that his officers had not sufficiently reconnoitred the strength of our defensive works, thought fit to inspect them himself, and approached them with great boldness. But this devoted action went near to cost him his life, for Major Curély, one of the best officers in the French army, having caught sight of the Russian general, dashed upon him at the head of the squadron of the 20th Chasseurs, sabred part of his escort, and, making up to Wittgenstein, forced him at the sword's point to surrender his own. After this important capture of the enemy's commander-in-chief, Major Curély should have promptly retired and brought his prisoner into the entrenched camp, but he was too impetuous, and seeing that the Russian general's escort was returning to the charge in order to set him free, he though that French honour was involved in his keeping his prisoner in spite of every effort on the enemy's part. Thus Wittgenstein found himself for some minutes in the middle of a group contending for the possession of his person, but Curély's horse was killed and several of our chasseurs leapt down to pick up their commander. Then Wittgenstein, taking advantage of the confusion, made off at full gallop, ordering his men to follow.

This episode, which was soon known throughout the army, gave rise to a lively controversy. Some declared that Curély's moderation in not striking Wittgenstein should have come to an end at the moment when the Russians, returning to the fight, were on the point of setting their general free, and they maintain that Curély ought then to have run him through. But others held that, having accepted the Russian general's surrender, Curély had no longer the right to kill him. There may be some truth in this last argument, but for it to be perfectly sound General Wittgenstein should, after the example of the knights of old, have constituted himself a prisoner, rescue or no rescue. It seems, however, that he had not entered into any such engagement, or else that he broke it, seeing that he escaped as soon as he saw a

chance. Had he the right to do so? That is a question very difficult to settle. So is also that respecting Curély's alleged right to kill Wittgenstein while they were trying to recapture him. Anyhow, when Curély was afterwards presented to the Emperor, during the passage of the Beresina, where Wittgenstein inflicted such heavy loss on us, Napoleon said to him: 'This disaster would probably not have happened if you had used your right to kill Wittgenstein on the battle-field of Polotsk, when the Russians were trying to tear him from your hands.' In spite of this reproach, whether deserved or not, Curély became a colonel soon afterwards, and general in 1814.

But to return to Polotsk. Repulsed on October 17, the enemy returned to the attack on the 18th, in such strength that, after suffering immense loss, Wittgenstein captured the entrenched camp. But Saint-Cyr, at the head of Legrand's and Maison's divisions, drove him out with the bayonet. Seven times did the Russians return with fury to the charge, and seven times did the French and Croats repulse them, remaining in the end masters of all the positions. Marshal Saint-Cyr was wounded, but continued no less to direct the troops. His efforts were entirely successful, for the Russians left the field and retired into the forest, 50,000 men having been beaten by 15,000. Joy was general in the French camp; but on the 19th we heard that General Steingel, at the head of 14,000 Russians, had crossed the Dwina by Disna, and was marching up the left bank to turn Polotsk and enclose Saint-Cyr's army between his force and that of Wittgenstein. And before long his advanced guard appeared before Natcha, making for Ekimania, where were our cuirassier division and the light cavalry regiments, from which the marshal had kept only a squadron of each at Polotsk.

In a moment we had mounted, and driven back the enemy, who would, however, have had the best of it in the end, as strong reinforcements were arriving, and we had no infantry, had not Marshal Saint-Cyr sent three regiments from those guarding Polotsk. Then Steingel, whom an effort

would have brought to the bridges, stopped short, while Wittgenstein, on the other bank, also remained motionless. It seemed as if the two Russian generals, after having formed a well-conceived plan for a combined attack, did not dare to carry it out, but were relying on each other to beat the French. Our position was nevertheless terribly critical; for those on the right bank were being forced back by Wittgenstein's army, threefold theirs in number, upon a town, built wholly of wood, and a large stream, and had no way of retreat open, save by the bridges which Steingel, on the left bank, was threatening. Then all the generals urged Saint-Cyr to evacuate Polotsk; but knowing that the Russians only awaited the first sign of a retrograde movement to fall on his weakened army and throw it into disorder, he preferred to wait till night. Taking advantage, therefore, of the unexpected inertness of the enemy, he waited immovably for sunset. The arrival of this was luckily hastened by a thick fog, which hid each of the three armies from the others; and the marshal seized this favourable moment for retreat.

The numerous artillery and some squadrons which had remained on the right bank had silently crossed the bridges, and the infantry was about to slip away, when, at the moment of their departure, Legrand's men, unwilling to leave their huts to the Russians, set them on fire. The other two divisions, thinking that it was an arranged signal, did the like, and in an instant the whole line was in a blaze. The conflagration proclaimed our retreat to the Russians, their batteries opened, and their shells set fire to the suburbs as well as to the town. Their columns advanced upon it headlong, but the French defended the ground foot by foot, being able to see, by the light of the fire, as in broad day. Polotsk was burnt to the ground, both sides lost heavily, but our troops retreated in good order. All the wounded who could be removed were brought away; the rest, and many of the Russians, perished in the flames.

There appeared to be an utter want of agreement between the enemy's commanders, for during all this fighting Steingel remained quiet in his camp, and gave Wittgenstein no more

help than Wittgenstein had given him on the previous day.[1] Only when Saint-Cyr, after evacuating the place, had burnt the bridges over the Dwina and put himself out of Wittgenstein's reach, did Steingel begin to make arrangments to attack us. But by that time the French troops were concentrated on the left bank, and Saint-Cyr led them against Steingel, beating him off with a loss of more than 2,000 men.

In this hard fighting, during four days and one night, the Russians had six generals and 10,000 men killed and wounded. The loss of the French and their allies did not amount to more than 5,000, the difference being no doubt due to the superiority of our fire, especially in the case of the artillery. But our advantage in the matter of loss was in some measure balanced by the fact that Marshal Saint-Cyr was wounded, and the army thus deprived of a chief in whom it had entire confidence. It became necessary to replace him, and Count von Wrede, on the strength of his rank as general-in-chief of the Bavarians, claimed to take command over the French generals of division. But as they refused to obey a foreigner, Saint-Cyr, though in much pain, agreed to keep the leadership of the two corps a little longer. He ordered a retreat towards Dula, so as to bring himself near to Smoliany, thus protecting the flank of the road from Orcha to Borisoff, by which the Emperor was returning from Moscow. So well was this retreat conducted that Wittgenstein and Steingel, who had repaired the bridges, and were following us up with 50,000 men, did not dare to attack us, though we had not more than 12,000. As for Wrede, his pride was wounded, and he could not bring himself to obey. He marched, therefore, as he pleased with the 1,000 Bavarians whom he had left, and a brigade of French cavalry, which he had brought away by telling General Corbineau, what was not the fact, that he had been ordered to do so. His presumption was soon punished; being attacked and beaten by a Russian

[1] If we may believe Tchichagoff's memoirs, the fatal disunion which too often prevailed among Napoleon's lieutenants existed no less among those of Alexander. It was to this, in great measure, that the fragments of the Grand Army owed their escape at the passage of the Beresina.

division, he retired, without orders, to Wilna, whence he reached the Niemen. Corbineau's brigade refused to follow him, and rejoined the French army, to which you will see, when I come to speak of the passage of the Beresina, its return was of great service.

Meanwhile, by the Emperor's orders, Marshal Victor, at the head of the 9th army corps, 25,000 strong, half of which belonged to the Confederation of the Rhine, was hurrying up from Smolensk to join Saint-Cyr, and throw Wittgenstein back across the Dwina. This plan would have taken effect promptly if Saint-Cyr had had the chief command, but Victor was the senior, and Saint-Cyr, not wishing to serve under him, declared, the day after their meeting, which took place on October 31 before Smoliany, that he could campaign no longer, and, handing over the command of the 2nd corps to General Legrand, departed for France. The troops regretted him, for, though they did not like him personally, they did justice to his courage and his wonderful military talent. All that Saint-Cyr needed to be a consummate commander was a smaller share of egotism and the knowledge how to attach men and officers to him by attending to their wants. But no man is faultless.

Hardly had Marshal Victor taken command of the united 2nd and 9th corps when fortune offered him the chance of winning a brilliant victory. Wittgenstein, ignorant of the junction which had taken place, and trusting to his own superior strength, attacked our outposts imprudently, leaving difficult defiles in his rear. It only wanted a simultaneous effort of the two corps to destroy him, for our troops were now as numerous as his; their spirit was excellent, and they were keen to fight. But Victor, no doubt distrusting himself on ground which he had not seen before, took advantage of the night to retire, reached Sienno, and cantonned the two corps in the neighbourhood. The Russians also went away, leaving only a few Cossacks to watch us. This state of things, which lasted for the first fortnight of November, was very favourable to our troops, for the district offered plenty of resources, and they lived in comfort.

The 23rd Chasseurs, posted at Zapole, was covering one flank of the united corps, when Marshal Victor, hearing that a large force of the enemy was at Vonisokoi-Ghorodie, ordered General Castex to reconnoitre this point with one of his regiments. It was the turn for mine to march. We started at nightfall, and reached Ghorodie without hindrance. The village stood in a bottom, on a large drained marsh. Everything was quiet, and the peasants whom I questioned through Lorenz had not seen a Russian soldier for a month. I therefore prepared to go back to Zapole; but our return was not as calm as our outward march had been. There was no fog, but the night was very dark, and I was afraid of the regiment going astray among the numerous dykes in the marsh. I therefore took for guide one of the inhabitants of Ghorodie, who appeared less stupid than the others. My column had proceeded in good order for half an hour, when I suddenly perceived bivouac fires upon the hills surrounding the marsh. I halted my men, and sent out two intelligent sergeants to reconnoitre, bidding them try to avoid being seen. They soon came back, saying that a strong body was blocking our way, while another was in position in our rear. I turned round, and when I saw thousands of fires between me and Ghorodie it seemed clear that I had inadvertently got into the middle of an army corps, which was preparing to bivouac on the spot. The fires kept increasing in number; the plain and the hills were soon covered with them, and presented the appearance of a camp of 50,000 men, in the midst of which was I with less than 700 troopers. The odds were great, but how were we to avoid the danger which threatened? The only way was to gallop forward in silence along the main dyke upon which we were, to surprise the enemy by a sudden charge, and cut our way through, sword in hand. Once out of the light of the camp-fires, the darkness would save us from pursuit. Having decided on this course, I sent officers all along the column to let the troops know, being certain that all would approve my plan and follow me resolutely. I must admit that I was not without anxiety,

for the enemy's infantry might stand to their arms at the first challenge of a sentry, and kill many of my people while my regiment was passing in front of it. In the middle of my anxiety, the peasant who was guiding us burst into shouts of laughter, and Lorenz did the same. In vain did I question the latter, he could not stop laughing; and not knowing enough French to explain the unusual circumstances, he showed me his cloak, on which had just settled one of the will-o'-the-wisps which we had taken for bivouac fires. The phenomenon was produced by the marsh emanations, which a slight frost following on a day of hot autumn sunshine had condensed. In a little time the whole regiment was covered with these fires, as large as eggs, at which the soldiers were much diverted. Thus relieved from one of the greatest frights that I had ever had I returned to Zapole.

CHAPTER XXX

A FEW days later a fresh duty fell to me, in the course of which we had to face not will-o'-the-wisps, but the carbines of Russian dragoons. One day when General Castex had gone to Sienno to meet Marshal Victor, and my regiment was at Zapole, I saw two peasants arrive, and recognised in one of them Captain Bourgoing, an aide-de-camp of Oudinot's. That marshal, who, after being wounded at Polotsk on August 18, had gone to Wilna, having learnt that Saint-Cyr had been wounded in his turn on October 18 and left the army, had decided to resume the command of the 2nd corps. Knowing that his troops were in the neighbourhood of Sienno, he was making for that town, when, on reaching Rasna, he was warned by a Polish priest that a party of Russian dragoons and Cossacks was prowling about. He heard, however, at the same time that there were French cavalry at Zapole, and resolved to write to the commander asking for a strong escort. The letter was sent by the hand of M. de Bourgoing, who, for greater security, disguised himself as a peasant. It was just as well he did, for he had hardly gone a league when he fell in with a strong force of Russian cavalry, who, thinking he was an inhabitant of the country, took no notice of him. A few moments later M. de Bourgoing heard firing, and hastened on to Zapole. On hearing from him of the marshal's critical position, I trotted off with my whole regiment to bring him speedy succour. It was high time for us to do so, for, although the marshal had barricaded himself in a stone house and was defending himself valiantly with the help of his aide-de-camp and a dozen French soldiers on their way back to the army, his position was about to be forced by the Russian dragoons, when we

appeared. At sight of us they remounted and took to flight. My troopers pursued them, killed a score of them, and took some prisoners, with a loss of two wounded. Marshal Oudinot expressed his gratitude, and my regiment escorted him till he reached the French cantonments and was out of danger.

At the time of which I speak all the marshals of the Empire seemed determined to recognise no rights of seniority among themselves, for none would serve under one of his colleagues, however serious the occasion might be. When, therefore, Oudinot had resumed the command of the second corps, Victor, rather than fight Wittgenstein under his orders, marched off with his 25,000 men towards Kokanoff. Thus left alone, Marshal Oudinot marched his troops about for several days in different parts of the province, and finally established his headquarters at Tchereia with his advanced guard at Lukulen.

It was during a little fight which Castex's brigade had in front of that town that my promotion to colonel at last reached me. If you consider that as major I had received a wound at Znaym in Moravia, two at Miranda de Corvo in Portugal, one at Jakobowo, had served four campaigns with that rank, and that I had been in command of a regiment ever since the French entered Russia, you will perhaps think that I had pretty well earned my new epaulettes. I was none the less grateful to the Emperor, especially when I learnt that I was still to have the 23rd Chasseurs, of whom I was very fond, and by whom I knew that I was both beloved and valued. In fact, there was great joy throughout the regiment, and the brave men whom I had so often led to battle came, men and officers alike, to express their satisfaction at keeping me as their commander. The kind General Castex, who had always treated me as a brother, himself announced my promotion at the head of the regiment. Lastly, the colonel of the 24th, although we were not very intimate, came at the head of all his officers to congratulate me.

Meanwhile the situation of the French army was getting

worse every day. Field-Marshal Schwarzenberg, commander-in-chief of the Austrian corps which formed the right wing of the army, had by the basest treachery allowed Tchichagoff's troops to pass him; they had taken Minsk and were threatening our rear. The Emperor must have deeply regretted that he had entrusted the command of Lithuania to the Dutch general, Hogendorf, who, having seen nothing of war, did not know how to set about saving Minsk. The capture of that place was a serious matter; but the Emperor attached little importance to it, because he reckoned on passing the Beresina at Borisoff, where there was a bridge covered by a fortress in good condition and guarded by a Polish regiment. So great was Napoleon's confidence on this point that, in order to lighten the march of his army, he had had all his pontoons burnt at Orcha. This was a great disaster, for they would have assured us a ready passage over the Beresina, a passage which we had to buy at the cost of so much bloodshed. Secure as Napoleon felt with regard to this, on learning that Minsk was occupied by the Russians, he ordered Marshal Oudinot to come by forced marches to Borisoff; but we arrived too late, because General Bronikoffski, who was charged with the defence of the fort on the right bank, finding himself surrounded by large numbers of the enemy, thought to do a praiseworthy action by saving the garrison. Instead, therefore, of offering a stubborn resistance, which would have given Oudinot time to come to his relief, the Polish general abandoned the place, crossing with his whole garrison to the left bank and taking the road to Orcha, so as to rejoin Oudinot, which he did in front of Natcha. The marshal received him with displeasure, and ordered him to return with us towards Borisoff. Not only were the town, the bridge over the Beresina, and the fortress commanding it already in Tchichagoff's hands, but that general, who, after his success, was eager to fight the French troops, had started on November 23 to meet them with the greater part of his army, the advance-guard being commanded by General Lambert, the best of his lieutenants. The ground being level, Marshal Oudinot made the cuirassier

division march at the head of his infantry, preceded by Castex's light cavalry brigade.

Three leagues from Borisoff the Russian advance-guard came in contact with our cuirassiers, who, having had very little fighting in the course of this campaign, had begged for the honour of being placed in the first line. At the sight of these five regiments, which were still strong and well mounted, the Russian cavalry stopped short. Recovering their courage, however, they advanced again. Then our cuirassiers with a furious charge overthrew them, killing or capturing a thousand men. Tchichagoff, who had been assured that Napoleon's army was by this time only a disorderly and unarmed crowd, was not prepared for such vigour, so he retreated in haste towards Borisoff. It usually happens that after executing a charge the big horses of the heavy cavalry, especially the cuirassiers, cannot go on galloping. It was, therefore, the 23rd and 24th Chasseurs who were ordered to pursue the enemy while the cuirassiers came on at a slackened pace in the second line.

Tchichagoff had not only committed the mistake of coming to meet Oudinot's corps, but he had also caused all the baggage wagons of his army, to the number of more than 1,500, to follow him. So great, therefore, was the disorder in the headlong retreat of the Russians towards Borisoff that Castex's two regiments often found their march hampered by the vehicles which the enemy had abandoned. This hindrance became still greater when we entered the town, the streets of which were crowded with baggage and draught horses, among which were streaming the Russian soldiers, who had thrown away their arms, and were trying to get back to the Russian regiments. Still, we reached the middle of the town, but only after losing precious time, by which the enemy profited to get across the river.[1] The marshal's orders were to reach the bridge and try to cross it, together with the Russian fugitives; but in order to do this, it was necessary to know where the bridge was, and none of us was acquainted with the town. At length my troopers

[1] Tchichagoff's memoirs fully confirm all these details.

found a Jew, whom I questioned in German; but whether it was that the scamp did not understand that language, or pretended that he did not, we could get no information from him. I would have given a good deal to have had my Polish servant Lorenz with me, but the coward had remained behind when the fighting began. Still, we had to get out of the fix somehow; so we made several detachments explore the streets until at last they found the Beresina. That river was not yet sufficiently frozen for us to be able to cross it on the ice, so that it was necessary to pass over the bridge. But to take the bridge we required infantry, and ours was still three leagues off. Marshal Oudinot, who came up at this moment, ordered General Castex to supply its place by making three-quarters of his troopers dismount and attack the bridge formed into a little battalion armed with carbines. We hastened to obey, and, leaving our horses in the neighbouring streets guarded by a few men, made for the river, under the lead of General Castex, who chose to march to this perilous undertaking at the head of his brigade.

The recent discomfiture of the Russian advance-guard had carried alarm into Tchichagoff's army. Disorder prevailed on the bank which it occupied, where we could see masses of fugitives making off across the country. Thus, although it had at first seemed to me very hard work for dismounted troopers without bayonets to force a bridge and maintain themselves there, I began to hope for success when I saw that we were opposed by only a few skirmishers. I therefore ordered the section who should first reach the right bank to capture houses near the bridge, so that holding both ends of it we could defend it till our infantry came up, and thus secure the passage of the Beresina for the French army. But the guns of the fort began to thunder, and the bridge was swept by a storm of grape which threw our feeble battalion into disorder, and forced it for a moment to recoil. A band of Russian pioneers armed with torches took advantage of this moment to set the bridge on fire; but, as their presence caused the enemy's artillery to cease firing, we hurled ourselves on them, killing or throwing into the river the

greater number of them. The chasseurs had put out the fire, which had hardly caught, when a battalion of grenadiers came up at the double, and forced us at the bayonet's point to abandon the bridge, which was presently covered with lighted torches, and became a huge furnace, until its blazing heat compelled both sides to draw off. Thenceforth the French had to renounce all hope of crossing the Beresina by that bridge, and their retreat was cut off. This terrible calamity decided our fate and aided vastly to shake down Napoleon's throne and change the face of Europe.

Oudinot saw that it was impossible to force the passage of the river in front of Borisoff, and decided that it would be dangerous to crowd that town with his own troops. He therefore gave orders to encamp between Lochnitza and Nemonitza. Castex's brigade alone remained at Borisoff, under strict orders not to communicate with the other corps, so that the fatal news of the burning of the bridge might be kept from them as long as possible. They did not learn it till forty-eight hours later.

By the custom of war, enemy's baggage belongs to the captors. General Castex therefore authorised the men of the 23rd and 24th to take possession of the plunder contained in the 1,500 vehicles of all kinds which the Russians had left behind when they fled across the bridge. The booty was immense—a hundred times more, indeed, than the brigade could carry. So I assembled my regiment, and pointed out that as they had a long retreat before them, during which it would probably be impossible for us to continue distributing rations of meat, as I had done throughout the campaign, they had better take steps chiefly to supply themselves with provisions. I added that they should also think of protecting themselves against the cold; and that as overladen horses do not last long, they must not break theirs down with all sorts of things of no use in war. To sum up, I said that I should hold an inspection, and that all that was not food, shoes, or clothing would be rejected without mercy. To avoid all discussion, General Castex had had stakes planted, to divide the captured carriages into two divisions, and each regiment

had its own. As the town was surrounded on three sides by Oudinot's army, while the fourth side was covered by the Beresina and watched by pickets, our men could safely investigate the contents of the Russian carts and carriages. So when the word was given the search began. It seemed that Tchichagoff's officers took good care of themselves, for never in the equipage of an army was seen such a profusion of hams, pies, smoked fish and meat, and wines of all kinds, not to mention ship's biscuit, rice, cheese, &c. Our soldiers also benefited by the furs and strong boots which they found in the wagons, the capture of which thus saved many a man's life. The drivers had not even had time to take away their horses, and as these were nearly all good, we selected the best to replace any with which our troopers found fault. The officers also took some to carry the provisions with which each had so amply furnished himself.

The brigade passed the whole of November 24 in Borisoff, and, as in spite of all precautions the news of the destruction of the bridge had spread in the bivouacs of the 2nd corps, Marshal Oudinot, wishing that all his troops might profit by the goods contained in the enemy's wagons, agreed to let detachments from all the regiments enter the town, making room for others as soon as they had loaded themselves. Notwithstanding that Oudinot's troops carried off great quantities of provisions and all kinds of plunder, there was plenty left to be taken on the following day by the swarms of disbanded troops on their way back from Moscow.

Meanwhile the chiefs and all officers capable of estimating the awkward position of the army were feeling keen anxiety. Before us we had the Beresina with Tchichagoff's troops lining the opposite banks, Wittgenstein had outflanked us, and Kutusoff was in our rear. Except for the remains of the guard and the corps of Oudinot and Victor, now reduced to a few thousands, the rest of that Grand Army which had lately been so splendid was composed of sick and of disarmed soldiers, from whom misery had taken all their old energy. Everything seemed to conspire against us, for even though Ney had been able, thanks to the lowered temperature, to

escape the enemy a few days back by crossing the Dnieper on the ice, we had found the Beresina unfrozen in spite of the extreme cold, and we had no pontoons by which to cross it.

On the 25th the Emperor entered Borisoff, where he found Marshal Oudinot waiting with the 6,000 men who remained to him. Napoleon and the marshals and officers who accompanied him were surprised to see the good order maintained in the 2nd corps, the bearing of which formed a remarkable contrast to that of the miserable bands whom they were bringing back from Moscow. Our troops did not look so nice, indeed, as they would in a garrison town, but each man had kept his weapons and was ready to make a brave use of them. The Emperor, struck by their martial air, called together all the colonels and bade them express to their regiments his satifaction at their excellent conduct in all the sanguinary engagements fought in the province of Polotsk.

You will remember that when the Bavarian general, Von Wrede, left the 2nd corps he carried off with him Corbineau's brigade of cavalry, after deceiving the general by assuring him that he had orders to that effect. To this bit of deceit was due the salvation of the Emperor and the fragments of the Grand Army. As it turned out, Corbineau, dragged off against his will in the opposite direction to the corps to which he belonged, had followed General Wrede as far as Glubokoi. There, however, he declared that he would go no further unless the Bavarian general would show him his alleged orders to keep the brigade with him. As Wrede could not satisfy this demand, Corbineau left him and made for the head waters of the Beresina, then passing down the right bank he hoped to reach Borisoff, cross the river there, and taking the Orcha road go to meet Oudinot's corps, which he assumed to be in the neighbourhood of Bobra.

The Emperor has been blamed for that having several millions of Poles in his service he did not at the beginning of the campaign place some of them as interpreters with every general and every colonel; a prudent measure which would have avoided many errors. A proof of this was seen during

the dangerous journey of several days which Corbineau's brigade was obliged to make through an unknown country, of which no Frenchman could speak the language. Very fortunately one of his three regiments was the 8th Polish Lancers, the officers of which got all the necessary information from the inhabitants; a service which was of immense advantage to Corbineau. For instance, when he had come within half a day's journey of Borisoff some peasants informed his Polish lancers that the town was occupied by Tchichagoff's army. Corbineau was giving up all hope of crossing the Beresina, when the same peasants advised him to retreat, and guided his column to a point opposite Studzianka, a little village about four leagues above Borisoff, in front of which there was a ford. The three cavalry regiments crossed it without loss, and the general, making across country, cleverly avoiding any approach to Borisoff or to Wittgenstein's troops, who were posted at Rogatka, slipped between them and finally rejoined Marshal Oudinot on the evening of the 23rd, close to Natcha. This bold march of Corbineau's was creditable to him and most fortunate for the army, for the Emperor, seeing that it was physically impossible to restore the bridge at Borisoff, decided after consultation with him to cross the Beresina at Studzianka. Seeing, however, that Tchichagoff, having heard of Corbineau's passage at that point, had posted a strong division with plenty of artillery opposite Studzianka, Napoleon deceived the enemy by an artifice which, though it is pretty old, seldom fails. He pretended to have no design on Studzianka, but to be intending to make use of two other fords situated below Borisoff, the less unfavourable of which is by the village of Ukoloda. To this end one of the battalions which still had its arms was marched towards that spot, followed by many thousands of stragglers, whom the enemy were to take for a strong infantry division. The rear of the column was brought up by many wagons, some guns, and the cuirassier division. On reaching Ukoloda these troops began to do whatever was necessary to give the impression that they were constructing a bridge. Tchichagoff got warning of these preparations, and, nothing doubting but

that Napoleon's plan was to cross the river at this point and reach the neighbouring road to Minsk, not only hastened to send all the garrison of Borisoff by the right bank to the point opposite Ukoloda, but by an extraordinary piece of blundering, not having sufficient forces to guard the river both up and down at the same time, he also made all the troops which he had posted the day before above Borisoff, between Zembin and the Beresina, descend towards Ukoloda. Now, it is exactly opposite Zembin that the village of Veselovo, to which the hamlet of Studzianka belongs, is situated. Thus the enemy abandoned the point at which the Emperor wished to throw his bridge across, and hurried off uselessly to defend a ford six leagues below that of which we were going to make use.

Besides this blunder of massing his whole army below the town of Borisoff, Tchichagoff committed another which any sergeant would have avoided, and for which his Government never forgave him. Zembin is built on a broad marsh crossed by the road to Wilna. In the causeway which carries this road there are twenty-two wooden bridges, which the Russian general might have reduced to ashes in a moment, seeing that they are surrounded by a great many stacks of dry rushes. Had Tchichagoff taken this wise precaution, the French army must have been irrevocably lost. To cross the river would have done it no good, since it would have been stopped by the deep marsh which surrounds Zembin. But, as I have said, the Russian general left these bridges intact and went down the Beresina with all his people, leaving only some fifty Cossacks in front of Veselovo.

While the Russians were deceived by Napoleon's demonstration into abandoning the real point of attack, Napoleon was giving his orders. Marshal Oudinot was to take his corps in the night to Studzianka to allow of the construction of two bridges there, and then to cross to the right bank and form between Zembin and the river. Victor was to start from Natcha, and, forming the rear-guard, to drive all stragglers in front of him, try to defend Borisoff for a few hours, and then make for Studzianka and cross the bridges. Such

were the Emperor's orders, but events prevented them from being accurately carried out.

On the evening of the 25th Corbineau's division marched towards Studzianka, passing up the left bank of the Beresina. Castex's brigade and a few light battalions followed, and then the bulk of the 2nd corps. We were sorry to leave Borisoff, where we had passed two pleasant days. It might seem that we had a presentiment of the troubles in store for us.

At daybreak on the 26th we were at Studzianka. No preparations for defence were to be seen on the further bank, so that if the Emperor had kept the pontoons which he had burnt a few days before, the army might have crossed the Beresina on the spot. That river, which has been imaginatively described as of enormous width, is at most as wide as the Rue Royale at Paris, opposite the Ministry of Marine. As for its depth, it will be enough to say that the three cavalry regiments of Corbineau's brigade had forded it without any mishap three days before, and did so again. Their horses either never lost the bottom or had at most to swim two or three fathoms. At that moment the passage could be made by cavalry wagons or artillery, with slight inconvenience, the chief being that troopers and drivers had the water up to their knees, which was quite bearable, as the cold was, unfortunately, not enough to freeze the river, and there was little ice even floating down; a few degrees lower would have been all the better for us. The second inconvenience was also a result of the absence of severe cold; for the swampy meadow on the further bank was so muddy that saddle-horses could only cross it with difficulty, while wagons went in up to the axletrees.

Esprit de corps is no doubt highly praiseworthy, but one should be able to hold it in check or forget it in difficult circumstances. This was more than the artillery and engineer commanders could do at the Beresina. Each of these corps claimed the sole right to build the bridges, with the result that they got in each other's way, and no progress had been made when the Emperor arrived about noon on the 26th. He settled the difficulty by ordering that each should build

one bridge. Beams and laths were at once torn from the hovels in the village, and sappers and gunners fell to work. Then those brave men gave a proof of devotion, for which credit enough has not been given them. They leapt into the cold water of the Beresina and worked there for six or seven hours, though there was not a drop of spirits to give them, and they had no bed to look forward to for the following night, but a field covered with snow. They nearly all died when the great frost came.

While the construction of the bridges was going on, and my regiment with all the 2nd corps was on the left bank, awaiting the order to cross the river, the Emperor was striding about, accompanied by Murat, going from one regiment to another, and talking to men as well as officers. Murat, the brave and dashing soldier, who had performed such fine feats of arms when the French were marching victoriously on Moscow, had been, as it were, under an eclipse ever since they had left that town, and during this time had taken no part in any fighting. Men saw him following the Emperor about in silence, as though a stranger to all that was going on. When, however, he came in sight of the Beresina, and the only hope which had maintained their discipline, and now formed the last hope of safety, he seemed to awake from his torpor. Being very fond of the cavalry, and seeing that, of all the squadrons which had crossed the Niemen, those of Oudinot's corps alone remained, he diverted the Emperor's steps towards them. Napoleon was in ecstasies at the fine condition of the troops in general, and of my regiment in particular, for it was indeed stronger than many brigades. In fact, I still had more than 500 men mounted, while the other colonels of the army corps had, none of them, more than 200. I received, therefore, most flattering congratulations from the Emperor, in which my officers and men shared largely. It was just then that I had the joy of seeing John Dupont, my brother's servant, whose devotion, courage, and fidelity were above all proof. Left alone, after his master had been taken prisoner early in the campaign, John followed the 16th Chasseurs to Moscow, and accompanied the retreat,

always tending and feeding my brother's three horses. Nor would he sell one of them, in spite of the most tempting offers. The good lad came to rejoin me after five months of fatigue and misery, bringing all my brother's property; but, as he showed it to me, he said, with tears in his eyes, that, having worn out his boots and finding himself reduced to walking barefoot on the ice, he had made free to take a pair of his master's boots. I kept this good man in my service, and found him very useful a little later, when I was again wounded in the worst days of the retreat.

But to return to the passage of the Beresina. Not only did all our horses cross the river easily, but the canteen-men got over with their light carts, which made me think that it might be possible to unharness some of the numerous wagons which followed the army, and fixing them in the river one behind another to form in this way footways for the infantry. This would greatly facilitate the flow of the masses of isolated men who would next day be passing about the entrance of the bridges. This idea seemed to me so happy that, wet to the waist as I was, I recrossed the ford to communicate it to the generals of the Emperor's staff. They thought my plan a good one, but no one stirred to speak of it to the Emperor. Finally, General Lauriston said to me: 'I entrust to you the task of making this footbridge, the utility of which you have so well explained.' To this I replied that, as I had at my disposal neither sappers, nor infantrymen, nor tools, nor stakes, nor ropes, and as further I was unable to leave my regiment, which was on the right bank, and might be attacked at any moment, I confined myself to offering what I thought a good piece of advice, and would return to my post. With that I went into the water again and rejoined the 23rd. Meanwhile the engineers and artillery had at length finished the two trestle bridges, and Oudinot's infantry and artillery were sent across. On reaching the right bank they went and bivouacked in a great wood half a league off, beyond Zavniski, where the cavalry were ordered to join them. Thus we could watch Stakovo and Dominki, where the main road from Minsk comes in. By this Tchichagoff had taken all

his troops towards the lower Beresina, and by this he must perforce come back when he heard that we had crossed the river near Zembin.

On the evening of the 27th the Emperor with his guard crossed the river and established himself at Zavniski. The enemy had not yet shown. Much has been said of the disasters which took place at the Beresina; but what has never yet been said is, that the greater part of them might have been saved if the headquarters staff had understood its duties better, and taken advantage of the night of the 27th to get all the baggage and, still more, the thousands of stragglers who next day blocked the way across the bridges. After settling my regiment in its bivouac at Zavniski, I noticed the absence of a packhorse which carried our regimental cash-box and account-books, and therefore could not be allowed to run the risks of the ford. I thought, therefore, that his driver and the troopers who escorted him had waited till the bridges were finished. This they had been for some hours, and yet the men did not appear. Then, being anxious about them as well as about the important property which was entrusted to them, I thought I would go myself and assist them to cross, for I supposed that there was a block on the bridges. I galloped off, therefore, and what was my surprise to find them completely deserted. At that moment no one was crossing, while a hundred paces away I could see by the bright moonlight more than 50,000 stragglers and soldiers separated from their regiments—*rôtisseurs* as they were called. These men, sitting calmly in front of enormous fires, were grilling horseflesh without a notion that they had in front of them a river, the passage of which would cost many of them their lives on the next day, while they could at the present time cross it without hindrance in a few minutes, and finish preparing their supper on the other bank. Not one officer of the imperial household, not one aide-de-camp, not a single marshal, was there to warn those poor wretches, and, if necessary, to drive them to the bridges. It was in this disorderly camp that I saw for the first time soldiers returning from Moscow; it was a

heartbreaking sight. All ranks were confounded; there were no arms, no military bearings; soldiers, officers, even generals were clad in rags, and for boots had nothing but strips of leather or cloth hardly fastened together with string—a huge rabble, in which thousands of men of different nations were jumbled, shouting in every language of the continent of Europe, and unable to understand each other. Yet if in Oudinot's corps or in the guard some of the battalions had been selected which still kept their discipline, they might easily have driven the mass across the bridges. I myself, when returning to Zavniski, having only a few orderlies with me, succeeded, partly by persuasion, partly by force, in making 2,000 or 3,000 of the poor wretches cross to the right bank; but other duties called me, and I had to rejoin my regiment. As I passed by the head-quarters staff and Oudinot's staff I called attention to the empty state of the bridges, and the ease with which the unarmed men could be brought across at a moment when the enemy was not trying to do anything. But it was in vain; I only received evasive answers, and each man left the task of directing the operation to his colleagues.[1]

On returning to the bivouac of my regiment I was agreeably surprised to find the corporal and eight troopers who had had charge of our herd during the campaign. These good fellows were in despair because the mob of *rôtisseurs* had thrown themselves on our cattle, cut them up, and eaten them under their very eyes, without their being able to hinder it. The regiment consoled itself for the loss, for each trooper had taken twenty-five days' provisions at Borisoff. The zeal of my adjutant having urged him to return to the other side of the bridges to try and discover the guardians of our account-books, that brave soldier went astray in the crowd, could not recross the river, and was made prisoner in the tumult of the following day. It was two years before I saw him again.

[1] In his account of the campaign of Russia, published at Stuttgart in 1843, Faber du Faur notices this empty state of the bridges on the night of November 27, and even on that of the 28th.

CHAPTER XXXI

WE have now reached the most terrible moment in the fatal Russian campaign, the passage of the Beresina, which took place chiefly on November 28. When this ill-omened day dawned the position of the two armies was as follows. On the left bank Marshal Victor's corps, having evacuated Borisoff during the night, had reached Studzianka with the 9th corps, driving a crowd of stragglers before it. The marshal had left to act as rear-guard General Partouneaux's infantry division, which, having been ordered not to evacuate the town till two hours later, ought to have sent out several small detachments to follow the army corps, and so being connected with the main body by a line of scouts, as it were, to stake out the direction. Besides this the general ought to have sent an aide-de-camp to Studzianka to reconnoitre the roads and come back to meet the division. But Partouneaux neglected all these precautions, and contented himself with marching at the appointed hour. He came to where two roads forked, and he knew neither of them; but as he could not have been ignorant, coming from Borisoff, that the Beresina was on his left, he might have concluded that in order to reach Studzianka, which was on the river, it was the left-hand road that he ought to take. He did just the contrary, and, mechanically following some light infantry who were in advance, he got on to the right-hand road and walked straight into the middle of Wittgenstein's army. The division was quickly surrounded and compelled to lay down its arms.[1] Meanwhile, a major who was in command

[1] General Partouneaux made an heroic resistance, and before his division surrendered it was reduced to a few hundred combatants (see Thiers' *History of the Consulate and Empire*).

of the rear-guard, having had the good sense to take the road to the left, simply because it would bring him to the river, rejoined Marshal Victor at Studzianka. Great was the marshal's surprise when he saw this one battalion come up instead of Partouneaux's division. But his surprise changed to bewilderment when he was attacked by Wittgenstein's Russians, whom he supposed Partouneaux to be holding in check. Then Victor could no longer doubt that that general and all his regiments were taken.

But fresh disasters awaited him, for Marshal Kutusoff, who had been following Partouneaux all the way from Borisoff with a strong force, on hearing of his surrender quickened his march and came on to join Wittgenstein and crush Victor. The latter, with his corps reduced to 10,000 men, offered a vigorous resistance. His troops, even the Germans, fought with an heroic courage all the more striking because, while attacked by two armies at once and having the Beresina in their rear, their movements were further hampered by a number of wagons driven without any order by a crowd of individuals striving in wild tumult to reach the river. Even so, Victor held Wittgenstein and Kutusoff the whole day.

During this confusion and this fighting at Studzianka, the enemy, who aimed at getting possession of both ends of the bridges, were on the right bank, attacking Oudinot's corps, posted in front of Zavniski. Tchichagoff's 30,000 men, issuing from Stakovo, advanced with loud shouts against the 2nd corps, which could not number more than 8,000. But as our soldiers had not come into contact with those who were returning from Moscow, and had no idea of the disorder prevailing among those poor wretches, the tone of Oudinot's corps had remained excellent, and Tchichagoff was vigorously repulsed under the Emperor's eyes. He himself arrived at the moment with 3,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry of the guard, old and young. The Russians renewed their attack and broke the Polish Legion of the Vistula. Oudinot was severely wounded, and Napoleon sent Ney to take his place. General Coudras, a good infantry officer, was killed, and the

valiant General Legrand dangerously wounded. This action took place in a wood of huge firs. The enemy's artillery was thus prevented from getting a good sight of our troops, so that its volleys did not touch us; but as the shot flew over our heads they broke off branches thicker than a man's body, which killed and wounded many of our people and many horses in their fall. As the trees stood wide apart the cavalry could move among them, though with difficulty; in spite of which Ney, on seeing a strong Russian column advancing, launched what was left of our cuirassiers against them. Though executed under these unwonted conditions, that charge was one of the most brilliant I ever saw. Colonel Dubois, at the head of the 7th Cuirassiers, cut the enemy's column in two, taking 2,000 prisoners. Thus thrown into confusion, the Russians were pursued by the light cavalry, and driven back with immense loss even to Stakovo.[1]

As I was re-forming my regiment after this engagement, I saw my friend M. Alfred de Noailles coming towards me. He was coming back from carrying an order for Prince Berthier, to whom he was aide-de-camp; but, instead of returning to his chief, he said as he left me that he would go as far as the first houses of Stakovo to see what the enemy were doing. His curiosity was fatal to him, for, as he drew near the village, he was surrounded by a group of Cossacks, who threw him from his horse and dragged him along by the collar, striking him as they went. I sent at once a squadron to his assistance, but my effort was fruitless, for a brisk fire from the houses prevented the troopers from entering the village, and from that day nothing was ever heard of M. de Noailles. No doubt his richly-furred uniform with its gold lace had excited the cupidity of the barbarians, and they had butchered him. His family, hearing that I was the last Frenchman to whom he had spoken, asked me for information

[1] Tchichagoff, in his *Memoirs*, has done justice to the vigour of our cavalry in this affair. Both he and Count Rochechouart confirm every point of the details given as to these events—the capture and loss of Borisoff by the Russians, their ill-timed movement down the Beresina, the fighting at Zavniski, the fatal destruction of the bridges, and the retreat of our troops across the frozen marshes of Zembin.

about his disappearance, but I could give them no more than I have told here. He was an excellent officer and a good comrade.

But this digression has made me forget Tchichagoff, who, having been beaten by Ney, did not venture to attack us again all that day.

Having thus explained briefly the position of the armies on the two banks of the Beresina, I must say a few words as to what was taking place upon the river while the fighting was going on. The masses of unattached men—who had had two nights and days to cross the bridges, and who, in their apathy, had not taken advantage of them because no one compelled them to do so—wanted to cross all at once as soon as Wittgenstein's cannon-balls began to drop among them. The vast multitude of men, horses, and wagons got completely clubbed at the entrance of the bridges, blocking them without being able to reach them. Many were pushed by the crowd into the Beresina, and of these nearly all were drowned. As a crowning disaster, one of the bridges broke under the weight of the guns and ammunition wagons. All then made for the other bridge, where the confusion was already so great that the strongest could not withstand the crush, and a great number were suffocated. Seeing the impossibility of crossing the encumbered bridges, many of the wagon drivers urged their horses into the stream. But this method of crossing, which would have been very useful if it had been carried out in an orderly way two days before, was fatal to almost all who attempted it, because, pushing wildly forward, they hustled and overturned each other. Still, some reached the opposite bank, but as nothing had been done to prepare a landing by sloping away the banks—as the staff ought to have done—few vehicles succeeded in getting up, and many people perished there also.

During the night of the 28th, these horrors were increased by the Russian guns playing upon the wretches who were struggling to cross the river. At nine in the evening the cup of misery was overflowing, when Marshal Victor began his retreat, and his divisions came up to the bridge in good order,

but could only reach it by forcibly pushing aside all who obstructed their passage. But let us draw a veil over these horrible scenes. At daybreak on the 29th all the vehicles remaining on the left bank were burnt; and when General Eblé saw the Russians approaching the bridge, he had that also set on fire. Some thousands of poor fellows who remained near Studzianka fell into Wittgenstein's hands. Thus ended the most terrible episode of the Russian campaign, an event which would have been far less disastrous if anyone had known how to make use of the time which the Russians allowed us after reaching the Beresina, and had chosen to do so. In that passage the army lost from 20,000 to 25,000 men.

This great obstacle passed, there still remained an immense body of unattached men who had escaped the frightful disaster. These were cleared away towards Zembin. The Emperor and his guard followed, next came the fragments of some regiments, and lastly the 2nd corps, of which Castex's brigade brought up the extreme rear. I have already said that the road to Zembin crosses a wide marsh over a great number of bridges, which Tchichagoff, when he occupied that position some days before, had omitted to burn. We did not commit a like error; for, after the army had passed, my regiment and the 24th set fire to them easily by means of the dry reeds which were stacked in the neighbourhood. When he gave orders to burn these bridges the Emperor had hoped to be freed for some time from pursuit by the Russians, but it was written that all the luck was to be against us. Thus the frost, which at this season of the year should have turned the waters of the Beresina into an easy road, when we had to cross them left them almost as fluid as usual; but hardly were we over when the cold became severe, and froze them till they were solid enough to bear the weight of guns. The same took place with regard to the marshes of Zembin, so that burning the bridges was no use to us.[1] The three Russian armies which we had left behind us could betake themselves to the pursuit without any obstacle; luckily, however, they did so with little vigour.

[1] Tchichagoff excuses his own negligence by this fact.

Moreover, Marshal Ney, who commanded the French rear-guard, had got together all who were fit to fight, and made frequent counter-attacks on the enemy when they ventured to approach too near.

Since Marshal Oudinot and General Legrand had been wounded, General Maison had been in command of the 2nd corps, which in spite of its heavy losses was the most numerous in the whole army, so that the task of beating off the Russians usually fell to it. We kept them at a distance during November 30th and December 1st; but on the 2nd they pressed us so close with powerful forces that some serious fighting took place, in which I received a wound that was all the more dangerous from the fact that there were that day twenty-five degrees of frost.[1] I ought, perhaps, to say no more than that I received a lance wound, without entering into any details, for they are so shocking that I still shudder when I think of them; but I have promised to tell you the whole story of my life, so you shall hear what happened at the action of Pleshtchenitsi. In order to put you in a position to understand my story, I must tell you, to begin with, that a Dutch banker named Van Berghem, of whom I had been an intimate friend at the college of Sorèze, had at the beginning of the campaign sent me his only son, who, having become a Frenchman by the inclusion of his country in the Empire, had, though hardly sixteen years old,[2] enlisted in the 23rd. This young man had many good qualities and much intelligence. I took him for my secretary, and he always marched fifteen paces behind me with my orderlies. On the day of which I speak he was in his place, when, as we were crossing a wide plain, the 2nd corps saw hastening towards it a large body of Russian cavalry, which in a moment overlapped it and attacked it on all sides. General Maison arranged so well that our infantry squares beat off all the charges of the Emperor's regular cavalry. As, however,

[1 Presumably Centigrade; that is, 13° below zero Fahrenheit.]

[2 General Marbot's memory must surely have played him false here. He was himself but just over thirty, and it seems hardly credible that one of his school-friends can have had a son of sixteen.]

they brought into action a host of Cossacks, who came insolently up, spearing the French officers in front of their troops, Marshal Ney ordered General Maison to drive them away by sending at them all that was left of the cuirassier division, as well as Corbineau's and Castex's brigades. My regiment, which was still strong, found itself in front of a 'pulk' of Cossacks from the Black Sea, wearing tall astrakhan caps, and much better dressed and mounted than the Cossacks usually are. We charged them, but as Cossacks never fight in line they wheeled about and galloped away. Being, however, strangers to the locality, they went in the direction of an obstacle which is very uncommon in these wide plains, and were brought to a dead stop by a deep and broad ravine, which the perfect evenness of the ground made it impossible to see from a distance. Finding it out of the question to cross with their horses, and forced to face my regiment, which was on the point of catching them, the Cossacks turned, and closing up, met us bravely with their lances. The ground was covered with ice and very slippery, so that our tired horses could not gallop without tumbling. There was, therefore, no shock, and my line reached the motionless mass of the enemy at a trot only. Our swords touched the lances, but, as these were thirteen feet or fourteen feet long, it was impossible for us to touch our adversaries, who on their side dared not back for fear of falling over the precipice, nor advance to meet our swords. We therefore watched each other, until the following scene took place in less time than it takes to tell it. In haste to get done with the enemy, I called out to my men that they must catch hold of the lances with their left hand, turn them aside, and push into the middle of the crowd, where our short weapons would give us a great advantage over their long poles. In order to be better obeyed, I thought I would set the example, and, putting some lances aside, I actually succeeded in getting within the front ranks of the enemy. My adjutants and orderlies followed me, and all the regiment presently doing the same, a general scuffle ensued. But at that moment an old white-bearded Cossack, who, being in the hinder ranks, was separated from me by other combatants,

bent forward, and, pointing his lance adroitly between his comrades' horses, struck me with his sharp steel, which passed clean through below the knee-pan of my right leg. Feeling myself wounded, I was pressing forward to revenge myself on the man for the sharp pain which I experienced when I saw before me two youths of eighteen or twenty years, in a rich costume; they were the sons of the chief of the 'pulk.' An elderly man accompanied them as mentor, having no sword in his hand, nor did the younger of the two lads use his; but the elder charged bravely, and attacked me furiously. He seemed so undeveloped and so weak that I merely disarmed him, and taking him by the arm, passed him behind me, and told Van Berghem to look after him. The next moment, however, I felt a hard object laid against my left cheek, a double report rang in my ears, and a bullet went through the collar of my cloak. Turning sharply, I saw the young Cossack officer with a brace of double-barrelled pistols in his hands. He had just fired treacherously on me from behind, and he now blew poor Van Berghem's brains out. Beside myself with rage, I dashed on the madman, who was taking aim at me with his second pistol. But as he met my eye he seemed fascinated, and cried out in good French, 'Oh God! I see death in your eyes! I see death in your eyes!' 'Ay, scoundrel, and you see right!' And he dropped.

Blood calls for blood. The sight of young Van Berghem stretched at my feet, and my own action, the excitement of battle, and perhaps also the frightful pain of my wound, all combined to throw me into a state of feverish agitation. I made towards the younger of the Cossack officers, caught him by the throat, and was in the act of raising my sword, when the old governor, seeking to protect his ward, bent forward over my horse's neck in such a way as to prevent me from using my arm, and cried in a tone of entreaty, 'For your mother's sake pardon this one, who has done nothing!' On hearing him invoke that revered name, my mind, overwrought by the surroundings, was struck with hallucination: I thought I saw a well-known white hand laid upon the young man's breast, which I was on the point of piercing, and I

seemed to hear my mother's voice saying 'Pardon! pardon!' My sword point dropped, and I had the youth and his governor taken to the rear.

So great was my emotion after this incident that I could not have given any word of command if the fight had lasted much longer; but it was soon at an end. A great many Cossacks had been killed, and the rest, leaving their horses, had slid down into the ravine, where most of them perished in the snow-drifts which the wind had heaped up there. On other sides, too, the enemy were beaten off.

During the evening I questioned my prisoner and his attendant, and learnt that the two youths were the sons of a powerful chief who had lost his leg at Austerlitz, and in consequence vowed so fierce enmity to the French that, as he could fight them no longer himself, he had sent his two sons to the war. I could see that the cold and his grief would soon make an end of the junior, so I took pity on him and his old mentor, and set them at liberty. As the old man took leave of me, he said: 'When she thinks of her elder son, these lads' mother will curse you; but when she sees the younger, she will bless you and your mother, for whose sake you spared her only remaining child.'

The vigorous repulse with which the Russian troops had met in the recent action damped their ardour, so that we saw nothing more of them for two days, and our retreat to Malodeczno was secured. But if the enemy left us a moment's peace, the frost waged bitter war with us, for the thermometer fell to 27 degrees of cold. Men and horses were dropping at every step—many never to rise again. Still I remained with the fragments of my regiment, bivouacking in their midst every night in the snow. Where, indeed, should I have been any better off? My officers and men, who looked upon their colonel as a living flag, made it a point of honour to save me, and took all the care of me that our terrible situation allowed. The wound in my knee prevented me from riding astride, so that I had to put my leg on the horse's withers and sit quite still, which made me very cold, my pain being intolerable; but what could I do?

The way was strewn with dead and dying; our march was slow and silent. The remains of the infantry of the guard formed a small square, within which went the Emperor's carriage. He had Murat beside him. On December 5th, after issuing his twenty-ninth bulletin, which threw France into a state of dismay, Napoleon left the army at Smorgony, and set out for Paris. At Ochmiany he was nearly carried off by Cossacks. His departure produced a great effect on the troops: some blamed him for deserting them; others approved the course as the sole means of saving France from civil war and an invasion by our so-called allies, most of whom were only awaiting a favourable moment to declare against us. They would not dare to stir when they heard that Napoleon had re-entered his realm, and was organising a new army. This was the view which I shared, and events showed the justice of it.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE Emperor, at his departure, entrusted the command of his shattered army to Murat, who showed himself unequal to the task—one as difficult, it may be admitted, as can be imagined. Everyone's faculties of mind and body were paralysed by the cold, and disorganisation prevailed throughout. Victor refused to relieve the 2nd corps, which had been acting as rear-guard from the Beresina, and Ney had much trouble in making him do so. Every morning we left thousands of dead in our bivouacs. Then I congratulated myself on having in September made my troopers set themselves up with sheepskin coats, a precaution to which many of them owed their lives. So with the victuals with which we had supplied ourselves at Borisoff, for without these we should have had to fight for dead horses with the famished multitude. On this point I may say that M. de Ségur exaggerates when he says that the poor wretches were driven by the pangs of hunger to eat human flesh.[1] The road was so lined with dead horses that no one needed to think of cannibalism. Further, it would be a great mistake to suppose that provisions were altogether lacking in the district. They only ran short in the places actually on the road, since the neighbourhood of these had been drained when the army was on its way to Moscow; but it had swept by like a torrent without spreading laterally, and the harvest had since been

[1] 'Some wretches flung themselves into the blazing heaps; their famished comrades looked on unterrified; there were even some who dragged out the disfigured and roasted bodies, and it is too true that they dared to fill their mouths with this revolting food' (De Ségur). [Sir Robert Wilson (*Private Journal*) states that he *saw* 'a group of wounded men lying over the body of a comrade which they had roasted, and the flesh of which they had begun to eat.' This was before the Beresina.]

gathered, so that the country had in some measure recovered, and, by going a league or two to one side, a fair amount could be found. It is true that only detachments still in good order could make these expeditions without being picked up by the troops of Cossacks who prowled around us. I made arrangements, therefore, with several colonels to organise armed forages. These returned always not only with bread and some head of cattle, but bringing sledges laden with salt meat, flour, and oats, obtained in the villages which the peasants had not deserted; showing that if the Duke of Bassano and General Hogendorf, who had been entrusted with the management of Lithuania, had done their duty while they were at Wilna, they might with ease have established large stores. But they attended only to provisioning the town, and took no thought for the troops.

On December 26, the cold got far more intense, and that day was even more fatal than the preceding, especially for the troops who had not become gradually acclimatised. Among these was Gratien's division, consisting of conscripts to the number of 12,000, which had left Wilna on the 4th and come to meet us. The abrupt change from hot barracks to a bivouac with 29½ degrees of frost caused the death of nearly all these poor fellows within forty-eight hours. Still more terrible was the effect produced on 200 Neapolitan troopers of Murat's guard. They also had stayed a long time at Wilna when they came to meet us, but the first night which they passed on the snow killed them all. Those who were left of the Germans, Italians, Spaniards, and other foreigners whom we had brought into Russia saved their lives by a means repugnant to the French: they deserted, took refuge in the villages near the road, and waited till the enemy came up. This often did not occur for several days, for, strange as it may seem, the Russian soldiers, accustomed as they are to pass the winter in houses where draughts are always excluded and stoves are always lighted, are far more sensitive to cold than those of any other country, and the heavy losses which the enemy incurred from this cause explained the slackness of the pursuit. We did not under-

stand why Kutusoff and his generals merely followed us with a weak advance-guard, instead of hurling themselves on our flanks, overlapping us, and thus cutting off our retreat. But this manœuvre, which would have completed our ruin, was impossible for them, seeing that the greater number of their soldiers, no less than of ours, died on the roads and in the bivouacs. So intense was the cold that we could see a kind of vapour rising from men's ears and eyes. Condensing on contact with the air, this vapour fell back on our persons with a rattle such as grains of millet might have made. We had often to halt, and clear away from the horses' bits the icicles formed by their frozen breath.

Thousands of Cossacks, meanwhile, attracted by the hope of plunder, endured the inclemency of the weather, and kept alongside of our columns, having even the audacity to attack them at the points where they saw the baggage. A few shots, however, were enough to drive them away. Finally, in order to give us trouble without any danger to themselves—since we had been obliged for want of teams to leave all our artillery behind—the Cossacks placed light guns on sledges, and with these fired at our men until they saw a detachment coming in their direction, when they made off with all speed. These partial attacks, which did us, indeed, little harm, became very disagreeable by continued repetition. Many of our sick and wounded were taken and plundered by these marauders, some of whom acquired immense booty. Even from the ranks of our allies, the desire of acquiring wealth raised up new enemies for us—I refer to the Poles. Marshal Saxe, the son of one of their own kings, said rightly that the Poles are the greatest plunderers in the world, and would not respect even their fathers' goods. You may judge whether those who were in our service respected their allies' goods. On the march and in the bivouac they stole all that they could see, but as people began to distrust them, and petty larceny became difficult, they decided to go to work on a large scale. To this end they organised themselves into bands, threw away their helmets, and put on peasants' caps; and, slipping out of the bivouacs after dark,

they assembled at an appointed place, and came back to the camp shouting the Cossacks' war-cry of 'Hourra!' thus terrifying the weaker men, many of whom fled, leaving their effects behind. Then the pretended Cossacks, after pillaging all round, went off, and returned before daylight to their places in the French column, where they resumed the title of Poles, with liberty to become Cossacks again the next night. Attention having been called to this atrocious brigandage, several generals and colonels resolved to punish it. General Maison had such a good look-out kept in the bivouacs of the 2nd corps, that one fine night our outposts surprised some fifty Poles just as they were making up to play their part of sham Cossacks, and were on the point of giving their 'Hourra!' as pillagers. Seeing themselves surrounded on all sides, the brigands had the impudence to say that they had meant to play a practical joke, but, as it was neither the place nor the time for joking, General Maison had them all shot then and there. It was some time before we saw any more robbers of that sort, but they re-appeared later on.

On December 9, we reached Wilna, where there were still some stores, but the Duke of Bassano and General Hogendorf had retired to the Niemen, and there was no one to give orders. There, as at Smolensk, the commissaries required, before giving out provisions and clothing, that regular receipts should be handed to them, a thing which, in the disorganised state of all the regiments, was impossible to do, and thus precious time was lost. General Maison had several store-houses broken open, and his troops got some food and clothing, but the rest was taken the next day by the Russians. Soldiers from the other corps went about the town in the hope of being taken in by the inhabitants, but the people who, six months before, had been longing for the French closed their houses as soon as they saw them in trouble. The Jews alone received those who could pay for this fleeting hospitality. Thus repulsed alike from the stores and from private houses, the great majority of the famished men made their way to the hospitals, which soon were crammed to overflowing,

although there was not food enough there for all the poor people; but at least they were sheltered from the cold. Yet this precarious advantage decided more than 20,000 sick and wounded, among them 200 officers and eight generals, to go no further; they were utterly exhausted in mind and body. Lieutenant Hernoux, one of the stoutest and bravest officers of my regiment, was so distracted by what he had seen in the last few days that he laid himself down on the snow, and, no persuasions being able to make him rise, died there. Many soldiers of all ranks blew out their brains to put an end to their misery.

In the night of December 9, with 30 degrees of frost, some Cossacks came and fired shots at the gates of Wilna. Many people thought that it was Kutusoff's whole army, and in their terror left the town precipitately. I regret to have to say that King Murat was among the number. He departed without leaving any orders, but Marshal Ney remained and organised the retreat as best he could. We evacuated Wilna on the morning of the 10th, leaving there a great number of men, a park of artillery, and a portion of the treasure. Scarcely were we out of Wilna when the infamous Jews threw themselves on the French, whom they had taken into their houses to get out of them what little money they had, stripped them of their clothing, and pitched them naked out of window. Some officers of the Russian advance-guard, who were entering at the moment, were so angry at this atrocity that they had many of the Jews killed. In the midst of this tumult Marshal Ney had taken all whom he could set in motion along the road to Kovno, but he had hardly gone a league when he came to the heights of Ponari. This hill, which in ordinary circumstances the column would have crossed without noticing it, became a serious obstacle, since the ice had made the road so slippery that the horses were unable to drag the wagons up it. What remained of the treasure was therefore on the point of falling into the hands of the Cossacks, when Marshal Ney gave orders to have the chests opened and to let the men help themselves. This prudent step, the motive of which M. de Ségur probably

did not know, led him to say that the troops plundered the imperial treasure. In the *Spectateur Militaire* of the period I have also noted the following expression used by M. de Ségur: 'After the Emperor's departure, most of the colonels of the army, who had up till then gone on marching admirably with four or five officers or soldiers around their eagle, no longer took any orders save from themselves. There were men who went 200 leagues without turning their heads.' I may add that Marshal Ney, having seen the colonel and the major of a regiment which contained only sixty men fall in one fight, perceived that losses of this kind would stand in the way of reorganising the army, and gave orders that no more field officers should be retained in presence of the enemy than were in proportion to the number of the troops.

Some days before our arrival at Wilna, many horses of my regiment having died from the intense cold, while it was impossible to mount those that remained, all my troopers marched on foot. I should have been very glad to be able to do the like, but as my wound did not allow of this I got a sledge and harnessed one of my horses to it. This gave me the idea that I might by the same means save my sick, who now were numerous, and as in Russia a sledge can be found in the poorest house, I soon had a hundred, each of which, drawn by a troop horse, brought away two men. General Castex thought this manner of travelling so convenient that he authorised me to put all the other troopers in sledges. Major Monginot, who had become colonel of the 24th Chasseurs since M. A—— had been promoted to general, received the same permission, and all that remained of our brigade harnessed its horses and formed a caravan which marched in perfect order. You may think that by travelling thus we destroyed our power for defence, but you must know that on the ice we were much stronger with the sledges—which could go anywhere, and in which the horses had the support of shafts—than if we had remained mounted on animals which tumbled down at every step.

The road was covered with muskets which had been thrown away, and our troopers took two apiece and a plenti-

ful stock of cartridges, so that when the Cossacks ventured too near they were met by a brisk fire which quickly drove them off. When necessary, our men fought on foot; and in the evening we formed the sledges into a square, and lit our fires inside it. Marshal Ney and General Maison often came to pass the night there, finding it a safe place so long as we were pursued only by Cossacks. Doubtless it was the first time that a rear-guard had gone in sledges; but owing to the frost it was the only practicable method, and it answered.

Thus we continued covering the retreat till December 13, when we at length saw once more the Niemen and Kovno, the last Russian town. Five months before we had entered the Empire of the Czar at the same spot. What a change had since then taken place in our fortunes, and what had been the loss of the French army! When the rear-guard entered Kovno, Marshal Ney found a weak battalion of 400 Germans doing duty as the only garrison. With these he joined such troops as were left to him, in order to defend the place as long as possible, and enable the sick and wounded to get away into Prussia. On hearing that Ney was coming, Murat went away to Gumbinnen.

On the 14th, Platoff's Cossacks, followed by two battalions of infantry and some guns, all drawn on sledges, attacked Kovno at several points; but Ney, helped by General Gérard, beat them off and held the town till night. Then he made us cross the Niemen on the ice, and was himself the last to leave Russian soil.

We were now in Prussia, among allies. But Ney, worn out with fatigue, unwell, and, moreover, considering that the campaign was over, left us at once, and joined the other marshals at Gumbinnen. Thenceforth the army had no longer a commander, and the remains of each regiment marched independently through Prussia. The Russians, being at war with that country, had the right to follow us on to its territory; but content with having reconquered their own, and not knowing whether they should appear in Prussia as allies or as enemies, they thought it best to await orders from their

Government, and halted at the Niemen. Their hesitation gave us time to reach the towns of Prussia Proper.

Germans are for the most part humane, and many of them had friends or relations in the regiments which had gone with the French to Moscow. They received us well, and I must admit that, after sleeping for five months under the stars, it was delightful to find myself in a warm room and a good bed. But this rapid transition from any icy bivouac to comforts so long forgotten made me seriously ill. Nearly all the army suffered from the same cause; and we lost many, including Generals Eblé and Lariboisière of the artillery.

For all the decent reception which they gave us, the Prussians had not forgotten Jena, and the manner in which Napoleon had treated them in 1807 when he dismembered their kingdom. They hated us in secret, and at a signal from their king would have disarmed us and made us prisoners. General York, commanding the Prussian corps which the Emperor had so imprudently employed as the left wing of the Grand Army, being in cantonments between Riga and Tilsit, was already making terms with the Russians, and had sent Marshal Macdonald away, though he had enough shame left to refrain from arresting him. All classes in Prussia applauded General York's treachery; and as the provinces through which the French soldiers were just now passing, sick and disarmed, were full of Prussian troops, it is probable that the inhabitants would have tried to get hold of us had they not been restrained by fear for their king, who was at Berlin, surrounded by a French army under Marshal Augereau. This fear and a disavowal on the part of the King—the most honourable man in his kingdom—of General York's conduct, to the point of having him tried and condemned to death for high treason,[1] prevented a general rising against the French. We took advantage of its absence to get away and reach the banks of the Vistula.

[1 The sentence does not seem to have taken effect, for in the following year we find General York von Wartenburg in command of Prussian forces. In 1814 he was created count, and he lived till 1830.]

My regiment crossed that river near the fortress of Grandenz, which we had passed on our way to Russia. This time the crossing was very dangerous, for, as a thaw had taken place some leagues higher up, the ice was a good foot deep in water, and ominous crackings were heard foretelling a general break-up. The order to cross instantly reached me, moreover, in the middle of a dark night; for the general had just learnt that the King of Prussia had left Berlin and fled into Silesia, that the people were getting uneasy, and there was reason to fear that they would rise against us as soon as the break-up of the ice prevented us from crossing the Vistula. It was, therefore, absolutely necessary to face the danger. This was very great, for the river is very wide opposite Grandenz, and the ice was full of wide cracks which could only be seen with difficulty by the light of fires kindled on both banks. As it was useless to think of taking our sledges across, we left them behind; and, leading the horses, and preceded by men with poles to notify the cracks, we began our perilous crossing. We were up to mid-leg in half-frozen water, which made things worse for the sick and wounded; but bodily pain was nothing to the fear caused by the cracking of the ice, which threatened every moment to give way under our feet. A servant of one of my officers fell into a hole and never re-appeared. At last we reached the other bank, where we passed the night warming ourselves in fishermen's huts. Next day we saw the Vistula thaw completely, so that if we had delayed a few hours we should all have been made prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FROM the spot where we crossed the Vistula my regiment proceeded to the little town of Sweld, where it was cantoned before the war, and there I began the year 1813. That which was just over had surely been the most painful of my life.

We may now cast a glance at the causes which led to the failure of the Russian campaign. Of these the chief was undoubtedly the mistake into which Napoleon fell when he thought he could go to war in the north of Europe before making an end of that which he had long been waging in Spain, in which country his armies had just undergone heavy reverses when he made arrangements to attack the Russians at home. As the genuine French troops, when thus divided between the north and the south, were in both parts insufficient, Napoleon thought to make up by uniting battalions of his allies with them. It was like diluting generous wine with dirty water. The French divisions deteriorated; the allied troops remained as moderate as ever, and they it was who during the retreat threw the Grand Army into disorder.

A cause, not less fatal, of our reverses was the bad organisation, or rather total want of organisation, in the conquered countries. Instead of doing as we had done in the campaigns of Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland, namely, establishing in the country left behind by the way small corps which could form from post to post regular communications, and so secure that our rear should be undisturbed, and that ammunition, solitary men, and trains of wounded should move in safety, all our available forces were imprudently pushed on to Moscow, until between that place and the Niemen there was, with the exception of Wilna and Smolensk, not a garrison, not a store,

not a hospital. Two hundred leagues of country were thus given over to wandering bands of Cossacks; and the result was, that the sick when cured could not rejoin, and that, for want of convoys to evacuate them, all those wounded at the Moskwa had to be left for two months in the convent of Polotsk. They were still there when the retreat began; nearly all were captured, and those who reckoned that they had strength to follow the army died of fatigue and cold on the high road. Lastly, the retreating troops had no assured supply of food in districts which produce corn in abundance.

To the lack of small garrisons in our rear was also due the fact that out of more than 100,000 prisoners taken by the French in the course of the campaign, literally not one ever left Russia; the reason being that no organisation existed for passing them to the rear. Accordingly they all escaped with ease and returned to the Russian army; thus repairing in some degree its losses, while ours increased daily.

The lack of interpreters also did us more mischief than might be supposed. How were we to obtain information, when we could not exchange a single word with the inhabitants? For instance, when General Partouneaux mistook his road on the banks of the Beresina and marched into Wittgenstein's camp, he had with him a peasant from Borisoff, who, knowing no French, tried to make him understand by expressive signs whose camp it was; but for lack of an interpreter he was not understood, and we lost 7,000 or 8,000 men. So again, in October, under very similar circumstances, the 3rd Lancers was taken by surprise through inability to understand its guide's advice, and lost 200 men. All this time the Emperor had in his army several corps of Polish cavalry, most of whose officers and sergeants could speak very well; but instead of placing some of these, as should have been done, beside every general and colonel, they were left with their regiments. I insist upon this point because, though the French army is that in which there is the least knowledge of foreign languages, and great inconvenience has often resulted therefrom, this has never corrected us of the carelessness with which we treat a matter so essential in war.

I have already remarked how great a mistake it was to form the two wings of the Grand Army from the Prussian and Austrian contingents. The Emperor must have regretted it keenly—first, when he learnt that the Austrians had let Tchichagoff's army pass to cut off our retreat at the Beresina; and secondly, when he was informed of General York's treachery. But still more bitter must Napoleon's regrets have been during and after the retreat; for if at the beginning of the campaign he had composed the wings of the Grand Army of French troops and taken the Prussians and Austrians to Moscow, these latter would have borne their share of miseries and losses, and would have returned not less weakened than the other corps, while the French troops composing the two wings would have come back to Napoleon intact. I will even go further, for I think that in order to weaken Prussia and Austria, the Emperor should have demanded of them contingents three and four times as great as those which they sent. People said after the event that those two states would not have complied with such a demand. I think differently; for the King of Prussia, who came to Dresden entreating Napoleon to be so good as to take his son for aide-de-camp, would have refused him nothing; while Austria, in the hope of recovering some of the rich provinces which he had torn from her, would have done anything to oblige him. Napoleon was ruined by over-reliance on Prussia and Austria in 1812.

It has been asserted, and will long be repeated, that the burning of Moscow, which has been held to do honour to the bold resolution of the Russian Government and General Rostopchin, was the principal cause of the failure of our campaign. This assertion seems to me very doubtful. In the first place, the destruction of Moscow was not so complete but that there remained sufficient houses, churches, and barracks to lodge the whole army; as is proved by a report which I have seen in the possession of my friend General Gourgaud, at that time the Emperor's first orderly officer. It was not, then, lack of accommodation which compelled the French to leave Moscow; many people think that it was the

fear of provisions failing; but that is another mistake, for the reports drawn up by the Emperor for Count Daru, commissary-general to the army, prove that even after the fire there were in that immense town more than sufficient provisions to maintain the army for six months. It was not, therefore, the fear of dearth which decided the Emperor to retreat; and, so far as that went, the Russian Government would not have attained its end if that had been its end. It was, however, quite other than this; for, in fact, the court wished, by destroying the town, to strike a mortal blow at the old aristocracy of the Boyards, whose constant opposition had been centred there. Despotic as the Russian Government is, it has to reckon with a high nobility, whose displeasure has cost many emperors their lives. The most powerful members of that nobility having made Moscow the perpetual focus of their intrigues, the Government, ever viewing the increase of that city with fresh anxiety, found in the French invasion an excuse for destroying it. General Rostopchin, being one of the authors of this scheme, and charged with the execution of it, wished later on to throw the odium of his action on the French;[1] but the aristocracy was not deceived. It accused the Government so openly, and showed such displeasure at the useless burning of its palaces, that, in order to avoid personal disaster to himself, the Emperor Alexander was compelled, not only to allow the rebuilding of Moscow, but to banish Rostopchin, who, for all his protestations of patriotism, ended his days in Paris, detested by the Russian nobility.

Whatever the motives for the burning of Moscow may have been, I think that its preservation would have done the French more harm than good, since, in order to hold in check a city of more than 300,000 inhabitants always ready to revolt, it would have been necessary to weaken the army by keeping in Moscow a garrison of 50,000 men, who, when the moment for retreat came, would have been attacked by the populace; while, when nearly all the inhabitants had departed on account of the fire, a few patrols were sufficient to keep order. The only influence which Moscow may have had on

[1] In a pamphlet published in 1823 Rostopchin particularly insists that the fire was caused by accident.

the course of events arose from the fact that Napoleon, unable to comprehend that Alexander could not, under pain of being put to death by his subjects, sue for peace, thought that to evacuate the capital before concluding a treaty with the Russians would be to admit his inability to maintain himself there. He therefore persisted in remaining as long as possible at Moscow, and lost more than a month in waiting uselessly for proposals for peace. This delay settled our fate, because it gave time for the winter to declare itself before the French army could go and take up its quarters in Poland. But even if Moscow had remained intact the event would not have been altered. The catastrophe rose from the fact that the retreat had not been prepared for beforehand, and was not carried out in seasonable time; and yet it was easy to foresee that it would be very cold in Russia during the winter. But, I repeat, it was the hope of concluding peace which misled Napoleon, and this was the sole cause of his long stay at Moscow.

The losses of the Grand Army during the campaign were immense, but yet they have been much exaggerated. I have already said that I saw in General Gourgaud's possession a 'state' written all over with notes in Napoleon's hand, from which it appears that the number of men who crossed the Niemen was 155,400 French and 170,500 allies. On the return the Prussian and Austrian contingents went bodily over to the enemy, and nearly all the other allies had deserted individually during the retreat. An approximate calculation of the French loss cannot therefore be obtained by striking a balance between the effective force with which they entered on the campaign and that which remained when they crossed the Niemen for the second time. Now, from the 'states' presented in February 1813 it appears that 60,000 French recrossed the Niemen; so that 95,000 were missing. Of these 30,000 had been taken prisoners, and returned home after the peace in 1814. The total loss, therefore, by death of actual French was 65,000.[1]

[1] M. Thiers works out the figures of our losses as follows: 420,000 men crossed the Niemen, raised by subsequent reinforcements to 533,000; so that, of French and allies together, 300,000 must, according to him, have perished.

The proportion of loss in my regiment was far smaller. When the campaign opened the 23rd Chasseurs were 1,018 all told. Thirty more joined at Polotsk, bringing the total up to 1,048. Out of these I had 109 killed, 77 captured, 65 maimed, and 104 missing—355 in all; so that on the return of the troopers whom I had sent to Warsaw after the campaign, the regiment, when sent on beyond the Elbe in February 1813, could muster 693 mounted men, who had all shared in the Russian campaign. When the Emperor, who was at Paris looking after the reorganisation of the army, saw these figures he thought that there must be some mistake, and sent back my report, with orders to have a correct one made out. The second agreed with the first; whereupon the Emperor ordered General Sébastiani to inspect my regiment and draw up a 'state' of all the men present *by name*. All doubts being set at rest by this operation, and my statement confirmed, I received a few days later from the adjutant-general a letter in terms most flattering to the officers, and above all to myself. It was to the effect that Prince Berthier was instructed by the Emperor to express his Majesty's satisfaction for the care which we had taken of our men. The Emperor knew that the 23rd had not been to Moscow, and accordingly did not compare its loss with that of the regiments who had reached that point, but founded his estimate on that of the 2nd army corps, which, having been placed in similar conditions, should have lost only in the same proportion. He found, however, that the 23rd, though it had been more exposed than the other regiments to the enemy's fire, was the one which had brought back the greatest number of men; a result which his Majesty ascribed to the zeal of its colonel, its officers, and non-commissioned officers, no less than to the excellent tone of its men.

After reading out this letter in the presence of all the squadrons, I intended to keep it as a glorious heirloom for my family; but it was withheld by a scruple which you will doubtless approve. It appeared scarcely seemly to deprive the regiment of a document, which, as it contained the proof of the Emperor's satisfaction with all, belonged to all. I therefore

placed Berthier's letter among the regimental archives. I have repented this delicate attention; for almost before a year was out, the Government of Louis XVIII., on coming into power in 1814, amalgamated the 23rd Chasseurs with the 3rd of the same arm. The archives of the two corps were at first put together and badly looked after, until, at the general reduction of the army in 1815, they were lost in the vast gulf of the War Office. After the revolution of 1830 I got the adjutant-general to look for the letter; but it was in vain: I never succeeded in recovering it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE year 1813 opened inauspiciously enough for France. The fragments of our army had hardly crossed the Vistula and begun to reorganise, when the treachery of General York and his troops compelled us to withdraw behind the Oder, and before long to evacuate Berlin and the whole of Prussia, which was now, with the help of the forces which Napoleon had imprudently left there, in arms against us. The Russians made all haste to rejoin the Prussians, and the King of Prussia declared war against the Emperor of the French.

In the north of Germany Napoleon had only two divisions. It is true that they were commanded by Augereau, but they consisted almost wholly of recruits. The French who had been to Russia recovered their strength as soon as they got proper food and had no longer to sleep on the snow, and they might have been opposed to the enemy. But the troopers were nearly all dismounted; very few infantrymen had kept their muskets. We had no artillery. Most of the men were shoeless, and their clothes were in rags. The Government had, indeed, occupied part of 1812 in having equipment of all kinds got ready; but owing to the neglect of the administration, which was then directed by the Count of Cessac, no regiment got the clothes intended for it. The conduct of our administrators in this matter deserves to be noticed. This was what happened. As soon as the costly and extensive equipment required by a regiment had been got ready at its depôt, the office made arrangements with a firm of carriers to transport them to Mainz, then included in the Empire. The packets were in no danger so long as they were passing through France; still, by M. de Cessac's orders,

a detachment had to escort them as far as Mainz. There the French carriers and their escort were dismissed, and the cases handed over to foreign contractors, who were to take them to Magdeburg, Berlin, or the Vistula, without any oversight by a French agent. The duty was therefore performed so dishonestly and so slowly, that packages of clothing and shoes took from six to eight months to accomplish the journey from Mainz to the Vistula, for which six weeks would have sufficed.

But what was only a serious inconvenience so long as the French armies were in peaceable occupation of Germany and Poland after the Russian campaign became a calamity. More than 200 boats laden with property intended for our regiments were icebound on the Bromberg canal near Nackel when we passed that point in January 1813. But as there was not a single French agent with the convoy to let us know, while the boatmen, being all Prussians, considered themselves already our enemies and said not a word, we passed on thinking that they were merely barges with merchandise. Next day the Prussians took more than twelve millions' worth of clothing, linen, and boots, which had been meant for our unlucky soldiers, and served to clothe several of the regiments which Prussia levied against us. The frost came on with renewed severity, and caused the death of several thousands more French; but none the less people bragged about our able administration.

The lack of regularity with which the march of the French across Prussia was conducted arose in the first instance from the carelessness of Murat, who had taken the command after the Emperor's departure, and later on from the weakness of Eugène Beauharnais. It was indeed high time to recross the Elbe into the territory of the Confederation of the Rhine. But before making up his mind to remove his troops from Poland and Prussia, the Emperor, wishing to leave at his disposal means of returning to the attack, gave orders to leave strong garrisons in such places as to secure the passage of the Vistula, the Oder, and the Elbe. This important decision may be regarded from two different points of view; so that

some well-informed soldiers have praised it, while others, equally competent to judge, have blamed it severely. The former say that the necessity for giving rest and shelter to the numerous sick and wounded whom the army brought back from Russia compelled the Emperor to retain fortresses the occupation of which would assure to the French the safety of a vast material of war and large supplies of food. They add that these fortresses would impede the movements of the enemy, who would be compelled to mask them, thus reducing the number of troops which they could employ against us; and lastly, that if the reinforcements brought up from France and Germany should enable him to win a battle, the fortresses which he kept would make it easy for the French to conquer Prussia, which would soon bring us back beyond the Vistula, and force the Russians to return to their country.

To this it is replied that by scattering his army over so many distant points, too far apart for the garrisons to support each other, Napoleon was reducing his strength, and that it was not right to endanger the safety of France in order to save a few thousand sick and wounded, very few of whom would be able to serve again. As a matter of fact nearly all of them died in the hospitals. Further, it was said that the Italian, German, and Polish regiments which the Emperor had attached to the garrisons to economise his own troops would do no good service: and indeed nearly all the foreign soldiers fought slackly, and ended by going over to the enemy. The last point was, that the occupation of the fortresses would cause very little hindrance to the Russian and Prussian armies, who would merely leave a corps to mask them and continue their march towards France; which was what actually took place. Each of these views has something to be said for and against it. Nevertheless, considering the circumstances in which the French army was placed, I feel bound to take the side of those who wished to abandon the fortresses; even their opponents admit that they could be of no use to us unless we could thoroughly beat the Russian and Prussian armies, which was another reason for endeavouring to increase our available forces instead of

distributing them indefinitely. Nor let anyone say that in that case the enemy, having no blockading to do, would also have increased the number of their battalions, and thus restored the proportion. To say this would be to fall into a great mistake, for he would have been always obliged to keep strong garrisons in the places which we had left. I may add that the useless defence of these numerous fortresses deprived our active army of many experienced generals, among others Marshal Davout, who was alone worth many divisions. I can understand that on campaign one may dispense with the services of several brigades when it is a question of entrusting to them the duty of guarding places on which the safety of the country depends, such as the towns of Metz, Lille, and Strasburg in the case of France, for one is then, so to speak, defending the body of the fatherland. On the other hand, the importance of fortresses 200 or 300 leagues from France was not absolute, but only conditional; that is to say, contingent on the success of our active armies. As this success did not come to pass, the eighty odd thousand men whom the Emperor left in 1812 in garrison in these places were compelled to lay down their arms.

The situation of France in the early months of 1813 was most critical. In the south, our armies in Spain had suffered great reverses through the reduction of our force in the Peninsula, whence regiments were continually being drawn; while the English never stopped sending troops to Wellington. Thus in the course of 1812 this general had made a brilliant campaign. He had recaptured Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, and Salamanca; had won the battle of the Arapiles,[1] and occupied Madrid; and now was threatening the Pyrenees. In the north, the seasoned soldiers whom Napoleon had led into Russia had nearly all fallen in battle or succumbed to their hardships. The Prussian army, still intact, had just joined with the Russians, and the Austrians were on the point of following their example. Lastly, the sovereigns, and still more the people of the Germanic Confederation, incited by England, were wavering in their

[1 Which we call the battle of Salamanca.]

alliance with France. The Prussian Baron von Stein, a man of resource and enterprise, seized this occasion to publish sundry pamphlets, in which he summoned all the Germans to shake off the yoke of Napoleon and reconquer their freedom. His appeal received all the more attention, since the maintenance of the French troops, which had been occupying Germany since 1806, had caused them great losses, to which had been added the confiscation of English goods, by reason of Napoleon's continental blockade. The Confederation of the Rhine would therefore have slipped from him if the sovereigns of the various states composing it had then made up their minds to yield to the wishes of their subjects. But so great was their habit of obedience to the French Emperor, and their fear of seeing him arrive at the head of the forces which he was rapidly organising and directing towards Spain, that none of them dared stir.

The majority of the French nation still confided in Napoleon. No doubt well-informed persons blamed him for having forced his army on to Moscow, and especially for having waited there till winter; but the mass of the people, accustomed to regard the Emperor as infallible, and having, moreover, no idea of what had really happened, or of the losses of our army in Russia, saw only the renown which the capture of Moscow had shed on our arms; so they were keen to give the Emperor the means of bringing victory back to his eagles. Each department and town was patriotically ready to find horses; but the levies of conscripts and money soon chilled their enthusiasm. Still, on the whole, the nation sacrificed itself with a good grace, squadrons and battalions rising as by magic from the ground. It was astonishing that, after all the draughts of men which France had undergone in the last twenty years, never had soldiers of such good quality been enlisted. This was due to several causes: first, there had been for some years in each of the 120 existing departments a so-called 'departmental' company of infantry—a kind of prætorian guard to the prefects, and formed by their picked men, who, being

their full strength, and, being regularly drilled and exercised, needed only their 'baptism of fire' to make them perfect troops. The companies varied in strength from 100 to 250 men; the Emperor sent them all to the army, where they were merged in line regiments. Secondly, a great number of conscripts from previous years, who, for one reason or another, had obtained leave to be placed at the 'tail' of their depôts, to wait until they were required, were called up. They too, as they grew older, had nearly all become strong and vigorous.

These were legal measures; but not so was the recalling of persons who had drawn a lucky number at the conscriptions and thus escaped service. All of these below the age of thirty were required to serve. This levy, therefore, furnished a number of men fit to undergo the fatigues of war. There was some grumbling, especially in the south and west; but so great was the habit of obedience, that nearly all the contingent went on duty. This submission on the part of the people led the Government to take a still more illegal step, which, as it touched the upper class, was still more dangerous. After having made men serve whom the ballot had exempted, they compelled those who had quite lawfully obtained substitutes to shoulder their muskets all the same. Many families had embarrassed, and even ruined themselves to keep their sons at home, for a substitute cost from 12,000 to 20,000 francs at that time, and this had to be paid down. There were some young men who had obtained substitutes three times over, and were none the less compelled to go; cases even occurred in which they had to serve in the same company with the man whom they had paid to take their place. This piece of iniquity was owing to the advice of Clarke the War Minister, and Savary the Police Minister, who persuaded the Emperor that, to prevent any movement of opposition to the Government during the war, sons of influential families must be got out of the country and sent to the army, to act in some sort as hostages. In order, however, to reduce the odium of this measure somewhat, the Emperor created, under the name of Guards of Honour, four

cavalry regiments formed of young men of good education. They wore a brilliant hussar uniform, and had generals for their colonels.

To these more or less legal levies the Emperor added the produce of a forestalled conscription, and many excellent battalions formed of sailors, and artificers or gunners of marine artillery, all well-set men trained in handling arms, who had long been weary of their monotonous life in ports, and were eager to go and win glory along with their comrades of the land forces. They soon became formidable infantry, and amounted to 30,000. Lastly, the Emperor further weakened the army in Spain by taking from it not only some thousands of men to replenish his guard, but whole brigades and divisions of seasoned veterans.

On their side the Russians, and still more the Prussians, were making ready for war. The indefatigable Stein was visiting the provinces preaching a crusade against France, and organising his Tugendbund, or League of Virtue, the initiated in which swore to take up arms for German freedom. This society was acting openly in Prussia, which was already at war with Napoleon, and was working its way among the states and armies of the Confederation of the Rhine, in spite of some of the sovereigns; so that nearly all Germany was in secret our enemy; and even the contingents which it contributed to our forces were ready, as events soon showed, to betray us on the first opportunity. These events were, indeed, only delayed by the natural slowness of Germans, for the fragments of the French army, after recrossing the Elbe at the end of 1812, remained undisturbed on the left bank of that river during the first four months of the next year without the Russians and Prussians, on the opposite side, venturing to attack them. They did not deem themselves strong enough, although Prussia had called out the Landwehr; while Bernadotte, forgetting that he was a Frenchman by birth, had declared war against us and united the Swedish troops with those of the enemies of his native land.

During our stay on the left bank of the Elbe the French army continued short of cavalry, except for a few regiments

of which mine was one. We were quartered in several villages not far from Magdeburg. While there I experienced a great disappointment. The Emperor, wishing to quicken the organisation of the new levies, and thinking that the presence of the regimental commanders at the depôts of their regiments would be useful for this purpose, decided that all colonels who had less than a certain number of men—for cavalry 400—under arms should return to France. As I had more than 600, I was obliged to stay, but I should have been glad to embrace my wife and the child which had been born while I was away. To the pain which this caused me was added another great annoyance: the good General Castex, to whom I had occasion to be so grateful during the Russian campaign, left us for the mounted grenadiers of the guard. General Corbineau had been appointed aide-de-camp to the Emperor, and the two brigades were combined under General Exelmans; General Wathiez replaced General Castex, and General Maurin, Corbineau. But as these three generals had gone to France after the campaign, and I was the only colonel at hand, General Sébastiani, to whose corps the new division was to belong, put me in command of it. This gave me much extra duty, since I had in terrible weather often to visit the cantonments of the three other regiments. My wound in the knee, though it had closed, still gave me pain, and I do not know how I should have carried on my duties to the end of the winter had not General Wathiez rejoined at the end of a month and taken command.

A few days after this, without any request on my part, I received orders to repair to France and organise the recruits and remounts which were in great numbers at the depôt of my regiment. This was at Mons, in Belgium, which then formed part of the Empire. I started at once, and travelled quickly, and as I knew that, having been authorised to come to France on duty, I could not properly ask for any leave to go to Paris, I accepted the offer of my mother-in-law, Mme. Desbrières, to bring my wife and child to Mons. After a year of separation and all that danger, it was a great pleasure to see my wife again, and for the first time to kiss our little

Alfred, now eight months old. It was one of the happiest days of my life. You may imagine with what joy I recalled how nearly my child had become an orphan on the day of his birth.

I remained at the depôt, very busy, till the end of June. The recruits were very numerous, fine men, and of a warlike race, coming nearly all from the neighbourhood of Mons, in the old province of Hainault, whence Austria, in the days when the Low Countries belonged to her, used to draw her best troopers. The inhabitants of this district are fond of horses, and take good care of them; but as those of the country were rather too powerful for chasseurs, I got leave to buy them in the Ardennes, and we were well remounted. At the depôt I found several good officers. Many of those who had served in the Russian campaign had gone there to recover from wounds or sickness, and the minister had sent me some young sub-lieutenants from the Cavalry School and from Saint-Cyr. Out of these elements I soon formed some squadrons, which doubtless were not perfect, but which could take their places, without too great contrast, among the veteran troopers whom I had left on the Elbe; and as soon as a squadron was ready it went off to the army.

CHAPTER XXXV

WHILE I was actively engaged in reconstituting my regiment, most of the colonels, especially those of the cavalry, being detained in France on the same duty, the allies crossed the Elbe and hostilities recommenced. The Emperor had left Paris, and on April 25 was at Naumberg in Saxony, at the head of 170,000 men. Only a third of these were French, since some of the troops who had recently been sent forward to Germany had not yet reached the seat of war. The remaining two-thirds were formed by the contingents from the Confederation of the Rhine, the greater part of whom were little inclined to fight for Napoleon. General Wittgenstein, who since our disaster at the Beresina had acquired some reputation, although the elements had done us much more harm than his combinations, was commander-in-chief of the united Russian and Prussian troops. These to the number of 300,000 appeared on April 28 before Napoleon's army in the neighbourhood of Leipzig.

On May 1 a brisk engagement took place at Poserna, in the plain rendered famous by the death of Gustavus Adolphus, and Marshal Bessières was killed by a cannon-ball. The Emperor regretted him more than did the army, which had never forgotten that it was through his advice that Napoleon had been hindered on the evening of the battle of the Moskwa from bringing his guard into action and thus completing his victory, whereby the aspect of events would have been changed and the complete destruction of the Russian troops brought about. On the day after Marshal Bessières' death, while Napoleon was continuing his march on Leipzig, he was unexpectedly attacked in flank by the allies, who had

crossed the river Elster before daybreak. This battle, which was known as Lutzen, was keenly contested. The troops recently arrived from France fought with the utmost valour, the marine regiments being especially distinguished. The enemy were beaten at all points, and withdrew towards the Elbe; but the French, having scarcely any cavalry, could take but few prisoners, so that their victory was incomplete. Nevertheless, it produced a great moral effect all over Europe and especially in France, as showing that our troops had preserved all their superiority, and that nothing but the frosts of Russia had vanquished them in 1812.

The Emperor Alexander and the King of Prussia, who, after having witnessed the defeat of their armies at Lutzen, had gone to Dresden, were obliged to leave it on Napoleon's approach. On the 8th he took possession of that town, where he was soon joined by his ally the King of Saxony. After a short stay at Dresden the French crossed the Elbe and pursued the allies, coming up with their rear-guard and beating it at Bischofswerda.

The Emperor Alexander, being dissatisfied with Wittgenstein, had himself taken command of the allied forces; but, being in his turn defeated by Napoleon in the action at Burtkau, he probably perceived that he was unequal to direct the troops, for he soon ceased to lead them. The allies halted and intrenched themselves at Bautzen, but the Emperor caused Ney to turn their position, and on May 21 gained a victory which was again rendered incomplete for want of cavalry. Still the enemy had 18,000 men disabled, and fled in great disorder.

On the 22nd the French came up with the Russian rear-guard in front of the defile of Reichenbach. Napoleon's small force of cavalry was commanded by General Latour-Maubourg, who led it with such energy that the enemy were driven in and abandoned the field after heavy loss. That of the French, though not very numerous, was of a kind to be much felt. General Bruyères, an excellent cavalry officer, had both his legs shot off, and died of the wound. But the most disastrous event of that day was caused by a ball which,

after killing General Kirgener, Marshal Lannes' brother-in-law, mortally wounded Duroc, the grand marshal of the palace—a man beloved by everybody, and Napoleon's oldest and best friend. He survived his wound a few hours, and the Emperor went to him and evinced the deepest feeling. His despair was most touching; the witnesses of that heart-breaking scene observed that, when obliged to leave his friend to resume the command of the army, Napoleon, on parting from him, bathed in tears, appointed a meeting in a 'better world.'

Meanwhile the French army, following up its success, had reached Silesia, and occupied Breslau, the capital, on June 1. Then the allies, the Prussians most of all, struck with alarm at their critical position, and recognising that, for all their big words, they were unable by themselves to stop the French, wished to gain time, in the hope that Austria might make an end of her hesitation and join forces with them. They sent, therefore, to sue for an armistice, which might, it was said, through the mediation of Austria, lead to a definite treaty of peace. Napoleon thought it right to grant this armistice, and it was signed on June 4, to last till August 10.

While Napoleon was marching from victory to victory, Marshal Oudinot got beaten at Luckau, losing 1,100 men. The Emperor's hope was that during the armistice his reinforcements would come up, and be at hand if a fresh campaign should be necessary. In spite of this, however, several of the generals regretted that the Emperor had not followed up his advantages. They said that if the armistice gave us the time to bring up our reserves it would do the same for the Russians and Prussians. The Swedes were already on the march to assist them, and they had hopes of the Austrians, who, though not ready at that moment, would have more than two months to mobilise their large army.

When I heard at Mons of the victories of Lutzen and Bautzen, I was vexed at not having shared in them; but my regret was diminished when I learnt that my regiment had not been there. It was, in fact, still in front of Magdeburg. M. Lacour, an old aide-de-camp of General Castex, was in

command of it as senior major. He was a brave officer; but had half-educated himself with the help of books, which gave him a self-conceit out of keeping with soldierly ways. I shall have to speak later on of the loss which his want of skill in command brought on the regiment. At the depôt I admitted as second major M. Pozac, a brilliant officer in all respects, who had won a sword of honour at Marengo.

Towards the end of June the task of organising the new levies was completed, and the colonels were ordered to return to their duty with the army. I had therefore to part from my family, with whom I had been spending happy days; but honour and duty had to be obeyed, and I took the road back to Germany. I went, in the first place, to Dresden, whither the Emperor had summoned all the colonels to question them as to the composition of the new detachments. In regard to this I learnt a thing which nearly broke my heart. I had organised four splendid squadrons of 150 men apiece. The two first, and luckily the finest, had joined the regiment; but the third had by the Emperor's orders been taken off to Hamburg, and drafted into the 26th Chasseurs, one of the weakest regiments in the army. This was quite regular, and I submitted without a murmur. But it was otherwise when I was informed that the fourth squadron, having come under the notice of Jerome, King of Westphalia, at Cassel, had taken his fancy so much, that he had on his own authority embodied it in his guard. I knew that the Emperor, angry at the liberty taken by his brother in thus carrying off his soldiers, had ordered them to resume their journey at once, and I hoped to get them back; but Jerome got at some of the Emperor's aides-de-camp, and they represented that as the King of Westphalia's guard was composed of untrustworthy Germans, it would be well to let him have a French squadron on whom he could count; that, further, the King had just given them handsome uniforms at his own cost; and, lastly, that even without this squadron the 23rd Chasseurs would be one of the strongest regiments in the French cavalry. Anyhow, my squadron was incorporated in the Westphalian bodyguard, object as I might. I could not reconcile myself

to this loss, and thought it very unjust that I should thus be deprived of the fruit of all my trouble.

I rejoined my regiment not far from the Oder. It was cantoned with the rest of Exelmans' division near the little town of Freistadt. M. Wathiez, my new brigadier, had been my captain in the 25th Chasseurs, and was always very kind to me. We were quartered in a comfortable château, named Herzogwaldau, in the centre of the village which my troopers occupied. While we were staying there a curious incident took place. A man named Tautz, the only bad character in my regiment, got very drunk, and threatened an officer, who put him under arrest. He was tried and condemned to death; and the sentence was approved. When the guard, under the regimental staff-sergeant, Boivin, went to fetch Tautz out to be shot, they found him in his cell perfectly naked, pleading the extreme heat. The staff-sergeant, a brave soldier, but of intellect not equal to his courage, instead of making the culprit dress, merely made him put on a cloak. When they reached the drawbridge across the broad moat of the citadel, Tautz flung the cloak in the faces of his guard, jumped into the water, swam across, and, reaching the shore, went off to join the enemy on the other side of the Oder. He was never heard of again. I reduced the staff-sergeant for his lack of vigilance; but he soon regained his epaulettes by an act of courage which I shall presently have to recount.

The new squadrons brought up the strength of the regiment to 993, nearly 700 of whom had been in the Russian campaign. The newly joined men were strongly built, and nearly all had served in the legion of the department of Jemmapes, which had made their training easy. I blended them with the old squadrons. Both sides were preparing for the struggle; but the enemy had used their time to raise up a powerful adversary for us, when they persuaded Austria to march.

The Emperor Napoleon, accustomed by many victories not to count up his foes, thought himself as invincible as ever when he found himself in Germany at the head of 300,000 men; nor did he sufficiently take into account the

elements composing the forces with which he was about to meet a hostile coalition of all Europe. As I have said, the material of the French army had never been finer; but since only a few of the new regiments contained men who had ever fought before, and the effects of the disastrous Russian campaign were still felt, our magnificent troops formed an army which was better adapted to use for the purpose of demonstrations for securing peace than in actual warfare; and most of the superior officers who had a near view of the regiments were of opinion that they needed several years of peace.

If from examining the French army one passed to those of their allies, one could find nothing but slackness, unwillingness, and a wish for an opportunity of betraying France. It was therefore, on all accounts, to Napoleon's interest to make terms; and to this end he ought, in the first place, to have brought back his father-in-law, the Emperor of Austria, to his side, by restoring to him Dalmatia, Tyrol, and a part of the other provinces which he had taken from him in 1805 and 1809. A few similar concessions to Prussia would have quieted the allies; who, it appears, offered Napoleon to restore the colonies taken from France, and to guarantee to him all the territory bounded by the Rhine and the Alps, as well as Upper Italy; but he would have to give up Spain, Poland, Naples, and Westphalia.

These proposals were reasonable enough; nevertheless, after conferring with the foreign diplomatists commissioned to treat with him, Napoleon treated Metternich with rudeness, and dismissed him with no concessions. It is even asserted that on seeing them leave the palace at Dresden he added, 'What a beating we are going to give them!' He seemed to forget that their armies were nearly three times as numerous as the forces which he had to oppose to them; for against the 320,000 men whom he had in Germany the allies could set nearly 800,000.

The Emperor's *fête* fell on August 15, but as the armistice ended on the 10th, he ordered it to be kept earlier, and the festivities of 'St. Napoleon's Day' were held in the canton-

ments. This was the last time that the French army celebrated its Emperor's birthday. There was little enthusiasm; for even the least foreseeing of the officers realised that we were on the eve of great changes, and their forebodings were reflected in the minds of the subalterns. Yet each was ready to do his duty, though with small hope of success, for we were vastly inferior to the enemy in numbers. Our allies of the Confederation of the Rhine were wavering, and the Saxon General Thielmann with his brigade had already gone over to the Prussians. So there was much uneasiness and little confidence among our troops.

Just then we heard that General Moreau had returned to Europe. After his condemnation in 1804, in consequence of Pichegru's conspiracy, he had gone to America. Now his hatred of Napoleon made him forget his duty to his country, and he tarnished his laurels by joining the ranks of the enemies of France. But the new Coriolanus soon suffered the penalty which his conduct deserved.

Meanwhile a vast circle was forming round the French army. A Russian corps was in Mecklenburg; Bernadotte, with a force of Swedes, Russians, and Prussians, occupied Berlin; the two main armies of Russia and Prussia were in Silesia; 40,000 Austrians at Linz, and their main force at Prague. Behind this front line, numbering altogether 560,000, were immense reserves.

On our side, 70,000 men, concentrated near Dahmen, were to act against Bernadotte; Marshal Ney guarded part of Silesia. Another corps was near Zittau. Saint-Cyr occupied Pirna, and covered Dresden; round which capital was posted the imperial guard, ready to give help where it was wanted. Even adding the garrisons left in fortresses, Napoleon's forces were infinitely less numerous than those of the enemy.

Our army was divided into fourteen infantry corps, so called, though each contained at least one brigade of cavalry. The generals commanding them were Vandamme, Victor, Ney, Bertrand, Lauriston, Marmont, Reynier, Prince Poniatowski, Augereau, Rapp (who was invested in Danzig), Macdonald, Oudinot, Davout, Saint-Cyr. Lastly, the guard

was under the immediate orders of the Emperor. The cavalry proper formed five corps: their commanders being Latour-Maubourg, Sébastiani, Arrighi, Kellermann, Milhau. The cavalry of the guard was under General Nansouty. While the army approved some of these selections, such as those of Davout, Ney, Augereau, Reynier, Saint-Cyr, it was sorry to see important commands given to such men as Oudinot, who had committed several blunders in the Russian campaign; Marmont, who had recently lost the battle of the Arapiles through over-haste; Sébastiani, who seemed unequal to the task; and it lamented that the Emperor should be testing the strategic powers of Lauriston and Bertrand in a critical campaign. The first was a good artilleryman, the second an excellent engineer; but neither had as yet handled troops in the field, so it was clear that they would not be able to lead an army corps. Probably Napoleon recollected that when he was appointed commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy, the fact that he had never had more than a few battalions under him did not prevent him from managing an army, and so thought that Lauriston and Bertrand would do the same. But a universal genius like Napoleon is very rare, and he could not expect to meet with such in these new commanders. In this way his personal affection towards those generals led him into the same error which he had already committed when he entrusted an army to the artilleryman Marmont. It is vain to argue on this point. The history of war shows that theory will not make a commander-in-chief; and that, with very rare exceptions, a man must have commanded a regiment of infantry or cavalry as colonel if he is to be in a position to handle masses of troops well. Very few men are capable of serving this apprenticeship as general officers, still fewer as commanders-in-chief. Louis XIV. never entrusted the command of a body of troops in the field to Marshal Vauban, and if he had offered it to him it is to be presumed that Vauban would have refused it and confined himself to what he understood, the attack and defence of fortresses. Marmont, Bertrand, and Lauriston had not the like modesty, and Napoleon's

affection for them prevented his heeding any of the remarks made on this point.

Murat, who had gone to Naples after the Russian campaign, rejoined the Emperor at Dresden. The Coalition—that is to say, the Austrians, Russians, and Prussians—opened the campaign by a piece of bad faith unworthy of civilised nations. Although, according to the latest convention, hostilities were not to recommence before August 16, they attacked our outposts on the 14th, and set the greater part of their troops in movement in consequence of Jomini's treachery. Up to that day only two Saxon generals, Thielmann and Longuereau, had debased themselves by going over to the enemy; the uniform of a French general had so far been clear of such a stain. This was inflicted upon it by a Swiss, General Jomini. That wretch had been a mere clerk in the office of the ministry of the Helvetic Republic, on a salary of 1,200 francs, when General Ney was sent to Berne in 1800 by the First Consul to arrange with the Swiss Government about the defences of that state, which was then our ally. The duties of the clerk Jomini, which had to do with keeping the register of the forces of the Republic, brought him in contact with Ney, who was thus able to judge of his talents, which were great. Yielding to his entreaties, Ney got him admitted as lieutenant, and soon after as captain in a Swiss regiment formed for the French service. His liking for him increasing, he got him made a French officer, took him as aide-de-camp, and gave him the means of publishing his works on the art of war—works which, though they have been overpraised, are certainly not without merit. Thanks to this powerful protection, Jomini rose rapidly, and when hostilities recommenced, in 1813, was a major-general, and chief of the staff to Ney. Then, however, seduced by the brilliant offers of the Russians, and forgetting his duty to the marshal, the Emperor, and his adopted country, he deserted; taking with him statements of the strength of the army and notes relating to the plan of campaign. Fearing, moreover, lest Napoleon, on hearing of his flight, should change his plans, he urged the allies to resume hostilities two days before the

date fixed. To the general surprise of Europe, Alexander rewarded his treason by making him his own aide-de-camp; an act which so shocked the Emperor of Austria, that one day, when dining with Alexander, seeing Jomini among the guests, he said audibly: 'I know that sovereigns sometimes have to employ deserters, but I do not see how they can admit them to their staff and their table!'[1]

Jomini's treason was a most disastrous blow to Napoleon, since many of his army corps were attacked while concentrating and obliged to surrender important positions for want of time to arrange for the defence of them. Meantime, the Emperor, finding the enemy forewarned and on their guard to prevent his intended march on Bohemia, resolved to attack the Prussians in Silesia, and to make the French forces who had been compelled to retire before Blucher resume the offensive in that quarter. On August 20 he reached Löwenberg and attacked a considerable force of the Coalition; and after various actions lasting over three days the enemy retired, with a loss of 7,000 men, behind the Katzbach.

During one of the numerous engagements of those days, Wathiez's brigade, while pursuing the enemy, was stopped by a broad and muddy brook flowing into the Bober. The only way of crossing was by two wooden bridges a quarter of a league apart, and swept by the Russian artillery. The 24th Chasseurs, now commanded by Colonel Schneit, attacked the left-hand bridge with its wonted intrepidity; but the 11th Dutch Hussars, which was sent to carry that on the right, behaved less well. In vain did its colonel, M. Liégeard, the only Frenchman in the regiment, call on his troopers; all were too much alarmed to stir. My regiment was in the second line, awaiting its turn; and as it got nearly as many balls as the 11th, I hastened forward to help the colonel of that regiment in persuading his men to charge, as the only means of silencing the fire. My efforts, however, being vain, and as it was clear that the cowardice of the Dutchmen would

[1] It should be said that the accusation against Jomini of having taken documents with him when he went over to the enemy has been contradicted. See Thiers, xvi. pp. 275, 276.

entail heavy loss on my regiment, I took my men to the front and was just about to send them forward, when I saw the left-hand bridge break under the first section of the 24th, drowning many men and horses. The Russians had prepared this catastrophe by ingeniously sawing through the beams which held up the flooring of the bridge. At the sight of this unfortunate accident I became afraid that the enemy would have set a similar trap at the bridge towards which my column was moving, so I halted there a moment to examine. It was a difficult business, for not only were the enemy's guns trained on that bridge, but it was open to the fire of one of his battalions. Just as I was about to call for a volunteer to undertake the duty, with the certainty of finding one, Staff-sergeant Boivin (whom I had reduced for letting the condemned man escape) dismounted and came up to me, saying that it was not fair that one of his comrades should be killed in reconnoitring the bridge, and begging me to let him do it in order to retrieve his fault. This noble determination pleased me, and I said: 'Go, sir, and you will find your epaulette at the other end of the bridge.'

Boivin advanced calmly in the thick of the fire, examined the flooring, went under the bridge, and came back to assure me that all was sound. I reinstated him; and having remounted he placed himself at the head of the leading squadron. The Russians retired without awaiting our attack. Next month, when the Emperor reviewed the regiment and made several promotions, I got M. Boivin appointed sub-lieutenant.

Our new general, M. Wathiez, gained the esteem and affection of the troops in these fights. General Exelmans, commanding the division, was only known to us by public report, which affirmed him to be a man of brilliant valour, but often lacking in the judgment which a commander should have. We had a proof of this in the following incident. Just as the division was executing a retreat, which my regiment had to cover, General Exelmans, under the plea of setting a trap for the Prussian advance-guard, ordered me to place at his disposal my picked troops, and my twenty-five best sharpshooters. He put Major Lacour in command of them, and

then posted these 150 men in the middle of a plain surrounded by woods, and, after forbidding them to stir without his orders, went off and forgot all about them. The enemy came up, and, seeing the solitary detachment, halted, suspecting an ambush. To make sure, they sent a few men one by one into the woods to right and left, and, hearing no shots, increased the number till our troopers were completely surrounded. Some of the officers observed to Lacour that his retreat was being cut off. Lacour, a brave soldier, but not original, stuck to the letter of his orders. It did not occur to him that General Exelmans might have forgotten him, and that it would be as well to send and let him know, or at least reconnoitre the ground by which he might retreat. He had been told to stay there, and stay he would, whether his men were killed or taken.

While Major Lacour was carrying out his orders in the style rather of a sergeant than of a field officer, the division was retiring. General Wathiez and I, not seeing the detachment return, and not knowing where to find Exelmans, who was galloping across country, began to feel very uneasy. I obtained permission from the general to go back for Major Lacour, and, starting with a squadron at full gallop, I got up in time to witness a terrible sight for a colonel who loved his men. After overlapping both flanks and even the rear of our detachment, the enemy attacked it in front with infinitely superior forces, so that 700 or 800 Prussian lancers surrounded our 150 men, who, to complete their misfortunes, had no way of retreat save a wooden foot-bridge over a deep mill-stream. Our troopers could only march in single file, so that there was a block, and my picked company lost several men. Some of them then perceived a large courtyard, and, thinking that it opened upon the stream, and that they would find a bridge there, entered it, followed by the whole detachment. The stream did indeed run along the yard, but at that point it formed the milldam, the banks of which were sustained by large slippery slabs, rendering the approach exceedingly difficult for horses, and giving a great advantage to the enemy, who had closed the gates of the courtyard in order to make

sure of capturing the French. At this critical moment I appeared on the other side of the stream with my squadron. I made the men dismount, four of them leaving their horses in the charge of one; the remainder, armed with their carbines, hastened towards the foot-bridge. This was guarded by a squadron of Prussians, but having remained on horseback, and with no firearms but pistols, they could not resist the fire from our carbines, and were forced to retire some hundred paces, leaving about forty killed and wounded on the ground. Those of my troopers who were shut up in the courtyard thought to take advantage of this respite to force the great gate; but I called out to them to do nothing of the kind. It would have done them no good, for in order to join me they would have been obliged to cross the foot-bridge on horseback, which they could only have done in single file, offering their flank and rear to the Prussians, who would promptly have charged and exterminated them. The bank was planted with riverside trees, among which infantry could defy a large number of cavalry in perfect safety. I therefore placed my dismounted men as skirmishers along the stream, and, as soon as they were in touch with the courtyard of the mill, I ordered those who were within it to dismount also and take their carbines; then, while a hundred of them kept the enemy off with their fire, the remainder could pass the horses along over the bridge.

While this movement was being executed in perfect order, the Prussian lancers, furious at seeing their prey on the point of escaping, tried by a vigorous attack to throw our retreat into disorder. But their horses were hampered by the willow branches, by pools of water, and numerous holes, and, being scarcely able to walk over the muddy ground, never succeeded in reaching our skirmishers, whose fire, well aimed at a short distance, caused them considerable loss. However, the Prussian officer who commanded the charge pushed boldly on to the middle of our line and shot one of my best officers, Lieutenant Bachelet, through the head. I regretted him keenly, but he was promptly avenged by his men, for several bullets laid the Prussian officer dead beside him.

The fall of their leader, their heavy loss, and their inability to touch us determined the enemy to retire. I took up my wounded and retreated unpursued. In this deplorable affair my regiment lost an officer and nine troopers killed and thirteen prisoners, among the latter Lieutenant Maréchal. The loss of these twenty-three men grieved me the more that it was needless, and fell entirely on the bravest men of the regiment, most of whom were marked for decoration or promotion. I was never able to console myself for this check, and it put the finishing stroke to our dislike of Exelmans. He got off with a reprimand from General Sébastiani and the Emperor, to whom he had been recommended by his friendship with Murat. Old General Saint-Germain, a former colonel of the 23rd Chasseurs, and indeed the man who had made the regiment, for which he had preserved a great regard, said openly that Exelmans deserved an exemplary punishment. A quarrel ensued, and they would have come to blows had not the Emperor personally intervened. Major Lacour, whose bad management had so largely contributed to the disaster, lost my confidence from that day forth.

CHAPTER XXXVI

AFTER beating the Prussian corps under Field-Marshal Blucher, who had retired behind the Katzbach river, the Emperor gave orders to pursue on the following day, but on learning that the Grand Army of the Coalition, 200,000 strong, under Prince Schwarzenberg, had debouched on August 22 from the mountains of Bohemia and was marching on Saxony, Napoleon took his whole guard, Latour-Maubourg's cavalry, and several divisions of infantry, and made his way by forced marches back to Dresden, into which Marshal Saint-Cyr had thrown himself with his troops, hastily withdrawn from the camp of Pirna. On leaving Silesia the Emperor had ordered Marshal Ney to follow him and left Macdonald in command of the army on the Bober, consisting of the 3rd, 5th, and 11th corps of infantry, and the 2nd of cavalry, which, with the artillery, formed an effective force of 75,000 men. As events showed, the command of such a mass of combatants was a task too heavy for Macdonald.

As you will have observed, the larger the number of troops engaged the less I describe their movements in detail. The work would be so great that I fear I should not be capable of performing it satisfactorily, and it would render the reading of these Memoirs too wearisome. I shall, therefore, relate the events of the war of 1813 more concisely than I have done in the case of my previous campaigns.

On August 28, 200,000 of the allies invested the town of Dresden, the fortifications of which were hardly able to resist a *coup-de-main*, and Marshal Saint-Cyr's situation with only 17,000 French became extremely critical. The enemy was badly served by his spies, so that he did not know that

Napoleon was close at hand, and, confiding in his numbers, put off the attack till next day. His confidence was increased by seeing two Westphalian regiments arrive, who having deserted Jerome joined the Austrians. Marshal Saint-Cyr was anxiously awaiting an attack on the morning of the 25th, but he was reassured by the arrival of the Emperor, who entered Dresden early that day. A few moments later, the enemy, expecting to have to deal with Saint-Cyr's corps only, marched on the town so impetuously that they carried several redoubts. The Russians and Prussians having occupied the suburb of Pirna, tried to drive in the Freiberg gate, when, by an order from the Emperor, the gate suddenly opened and out marched a column of infantry from the imperial guard, its leading brigade commanded by General Cambronne. It was like the appearance of the head of Medusa; the enemy recoiled in terror, their guns were captured, and the gunners killed on their carriages. Similar sorties were made from all the gates of Dresden with a like result; the enemy evacuated the captured redoubts and fled into the surrounding country, charged by Napoleon's cavalry. They lost 5,000 men disabled and 3,000 prisoners. The French had 2,500 killed or wounded, among the latter five generals.

Next day the French army attacked first, though its strength was less than that of its opponents by 87,000 men. There was at first a brisk and bloody engagement; but the rain falling in torrents on a heavy soil soon turned the battlefield into pools of muddy water, in which our troops moved with great difficulty. Nevertheless, they continued to advance, and the Young Guard was making the enemy's left give ground, when the Emperor, perceiving that Prince Schwarzenberg had made the mistake of insufficiently supporting his left wing, crushed it with Victor's infantry and Latour-Maubourg's cavalry. Murat, who commanded this part of the French line, showed himself more brilliant than ever; for after forcing the defile of Cotta, he turned and cut off from the Austrian army Klenau's corps, hurling himself upon it at the head of the carabineers and cuirassiers. His movement was decisive; Klenau could not resist that terrible

charge. Nearly all his battalions were compelled to lay down their arms, and two other divisions of infantry shared their fate.

While Murat was thus beating the enemy on their left, their right was being routed by the Young Guard, so that by three o'clock the victory was secured and the Coalition forces in retreat towards Bohemia. They left that day on the field eighteen stands of colours, twenty-six guns, and 40,000 men, half of whom were prisoners. The heaviest loss fell on the Austrian infantry. Percussion muskets were, of course, hardly known at that time, and the infantry used flint-locks, which became almost useless when the priming had got wet. Now as the rain had never stopped all day this had much to do with the defeat of the infantry by our cavalry. In regard to this a curious thing happened. A cuirassier division under General Bordesoulle, finding itself in front of a strong division of Austrian infantry formed in square, summoned it to surrender. The Austrian general refused; and Bordesoulle, going forward, pointed out to him that not one of his muskets could be fired. The Austrian general replied that his men could defend themselves with the bayonet, and would be all the better able to do so that the French horses were up to their hocks in mud, and could not meet them with the breast-to-breast shock in which the strength of cavalry lies. 'I will break up your square with artillery.' 'But you have none; it has stuck in the mud.' 'Well, if I show you the guns behind my leading regiment, will you surrender?' 'I shall have no choice, for I shall have no means left of defence.' Thereupon the French general brought up a battery of six guns to within thirty paces, and the gunners stood with lighted matches ready to fire. Then the Austrian division laid down its arms. It was indeed the artillery that played the principal part in this battle. Napoleon doubled the teams by taking horses from his commissariat wagons, to enable the guns to move, and our field pieces did great execution. It was a ball from one of them which struck Moreau.

Public rumour had some time back announced the return

to Europe of their once famous French general, and added that he had taken service among his country's foes; but few people believed the report. It was, however, confirmed in a curious way on the evening of the battle of Dresden. Our advance-guard was pursuing the routed enemy, when one of our hussars observed at the entrance of the village of Notnitz a magnificent Danish hound. The dog seeming to be looking uneasily for its master, the soldier called it and took hold of it. On its collar were the words 'I am General Moreau's dog.' Then they heard from the village priest that General Moreau had just had both his legs amputated in his house. A French cannon-ball had dropped among the Emperor of Russia's staff and broken both the famous deserter's legs, going through his horse's body. This happened just as the allied armies were defeated; and the Emperor Alexander, fearing lest Moreau should fall into the hands of the French, made some grenadiers carry him in their arms until the pursuit slackened, and it was possible to dress his wound and take both legs off at the thigh. The Saxon clergyman witnessed this terrible operation, and said that Moreau, knowing his danger, cursed himself, and incessantly repeated: 'What? I, Moreau, I to die among the enemies of France, struck down by a French ball!'[1] No man in the French army regretted him when it was known that he had borne arms against his country. A Russian flag of truce came to claim the dog on behalf of his aide-de-camp, Colonel Rapatel, and the animal was sent back, but without his collar. This was sent to the King of Saxony, and now is among the curiosities in the Dresden Gallery.

Meanwhile Prince Schwarzenberg had given orders to his beaten troops to rendezvous at Teplitz. The Austrians effected their retreat by the Dippoldiswalde valley, the Russians and Prussians by the Telnitz road, and the remains of Klenau's corps by that to Freiberg. Napoleon accompanied the pursuing corps as far as Pirna; but just before reaching that town he was attacked by sudden illness, with slight vomiting, the result of the fatigue caused by five days in the

[1 Another version of Moreau's end is given. See vol. i. p. 149.]

saddle under incessant rain. One of the inconveniences to which sovereigns are exposed is that there are always persons about them who, to show their attachment, profess to be alarmed at their smallest ailments, and must take exaggerated precautions. This was what happened in the present case. The grand equerry, Caulaincourt, advised Napoleon to return to Dresden, and the other high officials did not venture to give him the far better advice to go on to Pirna, only a league further. The Young Guard was there already, and the Emperor would have not only found there the rest which he needed, but have been in a position to direct the movements of the pursuing forces, for which at Dresden he was too far off. He left to Marshals Mortier and Saint-Cyr the task of supporting Vandamme, who, with the 1st corps, had been detached three days ago from the Grand Army. He had beaten a Russian corps and now was threatening the enemy's rear, blocking the road from Dresden to Prague, and occupying Peterswald; whence he could command the basin of Kulm and the town of Teplitz. But Napoleon's return to Dresden cancelled his recent success and led to a great disaster, which contributed powerfully to the fall of the Empire. I will give a brief account of that famous overthrow.

General Vandamme was a brave and good officer. He had acquired fame in the first Revolutionary wars, and under the Empire had constantly been in chief command of army corps, so that people were surprised that he had not got his marshal's baton; but this was due to his rough and overbearing manner. After his defeat his detractors said that it was the hope of earning that honour which had led him to throw himself so madly at the head of 20,000 men across the road of 200,000, and try to stop their passage. The truth, however, is that the chief of the staff had told him that he would be supported by Mortier and Saint-Cyr, and had given him a distinct order to capture Teplitz and cut off the enemy's retreat; so that he was bound to obey. Believing himself sure of support, he descended boldly towards Kulm on August 29, and thence, pushing the enemy before him, tried

to reach Teplitz. It is certain that if Mortier and Saint-Cyr had carried out their instructions, the Coalition forces, engaged in horrible roads and cut off from Bohemia, would have been attacked in front and rear and forced to surrender. Then the very persons who afterwards found fault with Vandamme would have been loud in his praise.

However this may be, when Vandamme arrived before Teplitz on the morning of the 30th, and found himself in front of Ostermann's Russian division, he attacked it vigorously; all the more so that he saw an army corps descending from Peterswald by the route which he had taken the day before, and had reason to believe that the promised aid from Mortier and Saint-Cyr was coming. But the newcomers were no friends, but two strong Prussian divisions under General Kleist. Marching on Kulm, by Jomini's advice, they had passed unperceived between Mortier's and Saint-Cyr's armies; owing largely to Saint-Cyr's indisposition to back up one of his colleagues, and its influence in the present case on Mortier. Neither stirred, though by co-operating with the brave effort of Vandamme they would infallibly have brought about the total defeat of the enemy. As it was, their columns, infantry, cavalry, artillery, baggage wagons, were huddled pell-mell in the narrow gorges of the mountains separating Silesia and Bohemia. Thus, instead of the expected aid, General Vandamme saw General Kleist's two divisions, which straightway attacked him. Continuing to make head against Ostermann's Russians, he faced about with his rear-guard and attacked Kleist furiously. The enemy was giving way at all points when immense reinforcements brought their total numbers above 60,000; and Vandamme's 15,000 were so hopelessly out-numbered that he was compelled to take steps for retiring on the corps of Saint-Cyr and Mortier which, according to the information he had received from Berthier, he still believed to be at hand. But on reaching the Telnitz defile, the French found it occupied by Kleist's army, and their passage entirely barred. Our battalion, however, led by General Corbineau's cavalry, which even in this rough country had claimed their right to act as

advance-guard, dashed on the Prussians so impetuously that they overthrew them and made their way through the defile, first capturing the whole of the enemy's artillery. They were, however, owing to the bad state of the roads, only able to take away the horses.

Soldiers who have seen service will understand that such a success can only be obtained at the cost of much bloodshed, and that after so terrible a fight the 1st corps was greatly reduced. Yet Vandamme, surrounded by forces ten times his own, refused to surrender; and placing himself at the head of his only two available battalions, charged into the midst of the enemy, in the hope of finding his death there. But his horse was killed, a strong body of Russians flung themselves on him, and he was taken prisoner. On the other side, generals, officers, and privates admired Vandamme's courage, and felt the greatest esteem for him; but, incredible as it may seem, the kind treatment ceased and was replaced by insults when the prisoner was taken to Prague. The Emperor of Russia and his brother, the Grand Duke Constantine, addressed him in insulting terms; and the Grand Duke actually snatched away his sword. Vandamme indignantly exclaimed, 'My sword is easy to take here; it would have been nobler to come and fetch it on the battle-field. But you seem to like your trophies to be cheap.' Thereupon the Emperor Alexander, in a rage, ordered the arrest of Vandamme, calling him 'plunderer' and 'brigand.' Vandamme replied, looking Alexander proudly in the face: 'I am no plunderer or brigand;' and, anyhow, history will not reproach me with having murdered my own father!' Alexander turned pale at this allusion to the assassination of his father, Paul I., to which he had been accused by rumour of having assented from fear of sharing the same fate, and quickly left the room. The French general, strictly watched, was taken to Wintka, on the Siberian frontier, and did not return home till after the peace of 1814.

[' According to a story told by Scott, Napoleon said that 'if he had had two Vandammes in his service, he must have made one hang the other.']

The battle of Kulm cost the French army 2,000 killed and 8,000 prisoners, including their general. The remainder of Vandamme's troops, to the number of 10,000, cut their way through and rejoined Saint-Cyr and Mortier. Those two marshals had been grievously wanting in their duty when they failed to pursue the enemy, and halted, the first at Reinhardsgrimme, and the other at Pirna, whence they could hear the sound of the battle which the brave and unfortunate Vandamme was maintaining. It may seem surprising that Napoleon had not sent an aide-de-camp from Dresden to make sure that Saint-Cyr and Mortier had started, according to his instructions, to succour Vandamme. As those two marshals did not carry out their orders, they deserved to be tried by court-martial.[1] But the French army was by this time so exhausted that if the Emperor had wished to punish all those who showed lack of energy he must have dispensed with the services of nearly all his marshals. For this reason, and because it was more than ever necessary to conceal his disasters, he confined himself to reprimanding Saint-Cyr and Mortier. Indeed, it was not only at Kulm that his troops had suffered defeat, but at every point of the long line which they held.

[1] M. Thiers (xvi. 351), when discussing the shares which the marshal and the Emperor himself had in the responsibility for the disaster, says: 'It was natural that Marshal Mortier should await Napoleon's commands without moving, and the definite order to support Vandamme only reached him during the 30th, by which time the catastrophe had already taken place. It is, therefore, impossible to find any fault with him.' This despatch, signed by Berthier, is in the possession of the Duke of Treviso.

CHAPTER XXXVII

It has been truly said that in the later campaigns of the Empire the fighting was seldom well managed when Napoleon did not direct it in person. It is to be regretted that the great captain did not realise this, and put so much trust in his lieutenants, many of whom—though, as we had plenty of evidence, they had no lack of self-confidence—were not up to their work. Instead of ordering the commanders of the detached corps to keep as much as possible on the defensive until he could come up with strong reserves to crush the opposing forces, the Emperor allowed them too much latitude; and as each of them wanted to have his own Austerlitz, they often attacked when it was unwise, and got beaten through their own fault. This was what happened to Marshal Oudinot, to whom Napoleon had given a large army composed of Bertrand's and Reynier's corps, with orders to watch the combined Prussian and Swedish troops, who were near Berlin under the command of Bernadotte. Marshal Oudinot, being weaker than his opponent, should have tried to gain time, but the habit of going straight ahead, the sight of the towers of Berlin, and the fear of not justifying Napoleon's confidence urged him on. He sent Bertrand's corps straight forward and was beaten, which did not stop Oudinot from persisting in his aim of capturing Berlin, but he lost a great battle at Gross-Beeren, and was compelled to retire with heavy loss towards Wittenberg.

A few days later, Marshal Macdonald, whom Napoleon had left on the Katzbach at the head of several corps, thought that he would take advantage of the freedom which the Emperor's absence gave him to try to win a battle, and wipe out the memory of his defeat on the Trebbia in the

Italian campaign of 1799; but he got beaten again. Personally brave though he was, he was always unlucky in war; not that he lacked ability, but because he was, like an Austrian general, too limited and too exclusive in his strategy. Before a battle he could chalk out a plan which was nearly always good, but he should have modified it according to circumstances, and this he was too slow-witted to do. He acted like some chess players, who can play very well as long as they are directing both sides, but are at a loss in a real game when the adversary moves his pieces otherwise than they had expected. Thus on August 26, the very day when the Emperor was winning a brilliant victory before Dresden, Macdonald lost the battle which the French call the Katzbach, and the Germans Jauer or Janowitz.

The French army, consisting of 75,000 men, including my regiment, was posted betwen Liegnitz and Goldberg on the left bank of the little stream of the Katzbach, separated by it from several Prussian corps commanded by Field-Marshal Blucher. The ground which we occupied was cut up with wooded hillocks which, though practical for cavalry, rendered its movements difficult and for that reason offered great advantages to infantry. Now as Macdonald's force consisted chiefly of that arm, and he had only the 6,000 force of Sébastiani's corps, while the enemy had 15,000 to 20,000 at his disposal posted on the vast level plateau of Jauer, it was obviously his duty to await the Prussians in his position. It may be added that the left bank of the Katzbach is low, while on the opposite side, in order to reach the plateau of Jauer, a lofty and rocky hill has to be climbed by means of a steep and stony road. The only bridges over the Katzbach are in front of the villages, which are few, and the fords are very narrow and become impracticable if the water rises in the least. The stream covered the front of the French army, than which nothing could have been more favourable to us, but Marshal Macdonald, wishing to attack the Prussians, abandoned the great advantages of his position and put the Katzbach behind him, ordering his troops to cross at several points. The cavalry corps, including Exelmans' division,

of which my regiment formed part, had to cross the river at the ford of Chemochowitz. The weather had been threatening in the morning, and this should have led the marshal to put off his attack till another day, or at least induced him to act promptly. Instead of this he lost precious moments in giving detailed orders, so that his columns were not in motion till two in the afternoon. Scarcely had the army started when a fearful storm came on, swelling the Katzbach and rendering the ford so difficult that General Saint-Germain's cuirassiers could not cross.

On reaching the opposite bank we had to climb a steep hill through a narrow defile, where the rain had made the ground so slippery that our horses were falling at every step. We were therefore obliged to get down, only re-mounting when we reached the plateau. There we found several divisions of infantry which the generals had prudently posted near the clumps of wood with which the plain is covered, for, as I have already said, we knew that the enemy was far superior to us in cavalry; and this was all the greater disadvantage to us because, as has been explained, the rain prevented the soldiers from firing. We were much surprised to see no sign of the enemy. The complete silence made me suspect some trap, since we knew for certain that on the previous night Blucher had occupied the position with more than 100,000 men. We ought, therefore, in my opinion, to have reconnoitred the country well before committing ourselves to it. General Sébastiani thought otherwise. As soon as Roussel d'Urbal's division was formed he sent it forward into the plain, not only with its own artillery, but with that of Exelmans' division which we had had so much trouble in getting on to the plateau. As soon as Exelmans perceived that Sébastiani had carried off his guns he hastened after that general to reclaim them, leaving his division without any orders. The two brigades composing it were about five hundred paces apart on the same front and drawn up in columns of regiments. Mine formed the head of Wathiez' brigade, having the 24th behind it and the 11th Hussars in the rear.

The plateau of Jauer is so extensive that we could barely see Roussel d'Urbal's division of seven regiments. A thousand paces from the right flank of my column was one of the numerous coppices with which the plain is studded. If my regiment had been alone at that point, I should certainly have searched the wood; but as Exelmans, who was very jealous of his own authority, had made it a rule that no man of his division was to leave the ranks without orders, I had not ventured to take that usual precaution, and for the same reason the brigadier had also abstained from doing so. This passive obedience went near to be fatal to us.

I was in front of my regiment—which, as I said, was leading the columns—when suddenly I heard loud shouts behind me. A large body of Prussian lancers had issued unexpectedly from the wood, and hurled themselves on the 24th Chasseurs and the lancers, taking them in flank, and throwing them into great disorder. Being directed obliquely, their charge reached the rear of our column first, then the centre, and now was threatening the head. My regiment was therefore about to be attacked on the right flank. The enemy was advancing quickly, and the position was critical; but fully confident in the courage and intelligence of all my men, I gave the order to charge first to the right at full gallop. The manœuvre was a risky one in presence of the enemy, but it was executed so quickly and in such good order that in an instant the regiment was fronting towards the Prussians. These from their oblique movement now presented their flank to us, and our squadron took advantage of this to penetrate the enemy's ranks, doing great execution.

On seeing the success of my regiment, the 24th, recovering from its surprise, rallied and repulsed the part of the enemy's line opposed to it. As for the 11th, however—the Dutchmen whom the Emperor had thought to make Frenchmen by a stroke of the pen—their colonel could not bring them to charge. However, we could do without them, for the 23rd and 24th were enough to rout three Prussian regiments.

While our chasseurs were in hot pursuit, an old colonel on the other side, who had been unhorsed, came near to me for safety, since, even in the heat of the fight, no one dared to strike him while he was under my protection. On foot, and over a soil washed to mud, he followed the rapid movements of my horse for a quarter of an hour, with one hand on my knee, saying: 'You are my guardian angel.' I was really sorry for the old man, for he was dropping from fatigue and yet would not leave me, till presently, seeing one of my men leading a captured horse, I made him lend it to the Prussian colonel, whom I sent to the rear with a sergeant. You will see that he lost no time in showing his gratitude.

Meanwhile, the plateau of Jauer and the banks of the Katzbach had suddenly become the scene of a bloody battle, for Prussian troops were emerging from every coppice and the plain was soon covered with them. I could not check my regiment, and we presently found ourselves in front of a brigade of the enemy's infantry, who, owing to the effects of the rain on their muskets, were unable to fire a shot at us. I tried to break the square, but our horses could only advance at a walk, and every one knows that without a dash it is impossible for cavalry to break a well-commanded and well-closed-up battalion which boldly presents a hedge of bayonets. In vain did we approach so close to the enemy that we could talk to them and strike their muskets with our sword-blades; we could not break their lines, as we could easily have done if General Sébastiani had not sent the artillery to another point. The position on both sides was truly ridiculous; we looked each other in the eyes, unable to do any damage, our swords being too short to reach the enemy, and their muskets refusing to go off. Things went on like this for some time till General Maurin sent the 6th Lancers to our aid. Their long weapons, outreaching the enemy's bayonets, soon slew many of the Prussians, enabling the chasseurs to penetrate into the square, where they did terrible execution. In this fight the sonorous voice of Colonel Perquit could be heard, shouting, in a rich Alsatian accent, '*Bointez, lanciers, bointez.*'

In this part of the field, then, the fight was going in our

favour; but things were altered by the arrival of 20,000 Prussian cavalry, who, having crushed Roussel d'Urbal's division, sent unsupported more than a league ahead, attacked us with overpowering forces. Their approach was notified to us by the return of General Exelmans, who, as I said, had left his division and gone off almost alone to get back from Sébastiani his guns, which that general had unwisely attached to Roussel d'Urbal's division. He had not found Sébastiani, but had reached the first division in time to see his guns captured, together with d'Urbal's own, and to find himself caught in the rout of his colleague's squadrons. We felt a presentiment of disaster on seeing our general hurry up with changed countenance, and having lost his hat and even his belt. In haste we halted our soldiers, who were engaged in sabring the enemy's infantry; but before we could re-form them we were enveloped by the Prussian squadron, who pursued the remains of d'Urbal's division right into our ranks.

In an instant the 5,000 or 6,000 combatants of Sébastiani's corps were overwhelmed by 20,000 troopers, nearly all uhlans, and therefore armed with the lance, a weapon which only a few squadrons of ours carried. The groups which we formed were thus, in spite of all our efforts, constantly broken up, and the enemy pushed us steadily back to the end of the plain, where the steep descent to the Katzbach begins.

At this point we were received by two divisions of French infantry, in rear of which we hoped to rally; but our men's muskets were also too wet to be fired. Their only means of defence was a battery of six pieces, with which and their bayonets they checked the enemy for a moment; but the Prussian generals brought up twenty pieces, the French guns were dismounted in an instant, and their battalions broken. Then, with one general *hurrah*, the enemy's troopers hurled us down in disorder to the Katzbach. The stream, which we had crossed in the morning with difficulty, had been transformed by the deluge of rain which had fallen all day long into a raging torrent. The water had overflowed, covering

almost entirely the parapet of the Chemochowitz bridge, and preventing us from ascertaining if the ford were still passable. People made, however, for the points where they had crossed in the morning; the ford was impracticable for men on foot, and many were drowned, but the greater number escaped by the bridge.

I got my regiment as much as possible together, making them march in close column of half-sections, so as to give mutual support. They entered the water, and reached the other side with the loss of two men only. All the other cavalry regiments took the same line, comprehending, even in the confusion of the retreat, that the bridges must be left for the infantry. I must admit that the descent of the hill was one of the most critical moments of my life. The steep ground slipped under our horses' feet, and at every step they stumbled over fragments of rock. The enemy's artillery, belching grape upon us, completed the horror of our situation. Still I got off with no accident, thanks to the pluck and cleverness of my Turkish horse. He went along the precipice like a cat on a roof, and saved my life, not for the only time. I shall have more to say about this excellent beast.

After crossing the Katzbach our troops expected to be safe from the enemy; but the Prussians had sent a strong column across the river by a bridge above that of Chemochowitz, so that when we reached the bank which we had left in the morning we were astonished to find ourselves attacked by numerous squadrons of uhlans. Yet several regiments—mine was mentioned by Marshal Macdonald in his despatch—went at the enemy without hesitation. I do not know, however, what would have happened if General Saint-Germain's division, which had been left behind in the morning and consequently was quite fresh, had not been on the spot to come to our succour. This division, consisting of two regiments of carabiniers, a brigade of cuirassiers, and six guns, attacked the enemy furiously, and drove the troops who had come to cut off our retreat into the river. Then, as nothing is so terrible as beaten troops who resume the offensive, the

troopers of Exelmans' and Roussel d'Urbal's divisions annihilated all whom they could get at.

This counter-attack was of great service to us, for it checked the enemy, who, on that day, did not venture to pursue us beyond the Katzbach. But the disaster to the French army was immense, for, having crossed the stream by all the fords and bridges between Liegnitz and Goldberg—that is to say, over a distance of more than five leagues—now that those passages were all rendered useless by the flood the French army found itself extended on a long front, with the Prussians in its rear and an almost impassable stream in its front. The scenes which I had witnessed on the plateau of Jauer and at the bridge of Chemochowitz were reproduced at all points of the battle-field. Everywhere the rain paralysed our infantry fire and favoured the Prussian cavalry, outnumbering us fourfold. Everywhere was our retreat rendered very dangerous by the difficulty of crossing the swollen Katzbach. Most of those who tried to swim the river were drowned, General Sibuet among the number, and we saved only a few guns.

After this disastrous affair, Marshal Macdonald tried to rally his troops on the towns of Bunzlau, Lauban, and Görlitz. A pitch-dark night, roads cut up, rain always falling in torrents, rendered our march slow and toilsome; many men fell out or went astray.

At the battle of the Katzbach, Napoleon's army lost 13,000 men killed or drowned, 20,000 prisoners, and 50 guns. Marshal Macdonald, whose miscalculation from a strategic point of view had brought about this irreparable disaster, though he had lost the confidence of the army, was able to preserve its esteem by the honest and straightforward way in which he admitted his mistake. On the following day he called a meeting of all the generals and colonels, and after inviting us all to help to maintain order, said that every man and officer had done his duty, that the loss of the battle was due to one man only, and that was himself, because when it came on to rain he ought not to have left broken ground to go and attack in an open plain an enemy out-numbering

him immensely in cavalry, nor should he have placed a river behind him in stormy weather. This noble confession disarmed criticism, and each man did his utmost to contribute to the safety of the army during its retreat to the Elbe.

Fate seemed determined to overwhelm us, for a few days after Oudinot had lost the battle of Gross-Beeren, Macdonald that of Katzbach, and Vandamme that of Kulm, the French experienced a serious reverse. Marshal Ney, who had succeeded Oudinot in command of the army which was to march on Berlin, was beaten at Jutterbach by the deserter Bernadotte, and compelled to abandon the right bank of the Elbe. The Emperor returned to Dresden, and the various corps under Macdonald took up a position not far from that town, while Marshal Ney, after driving back the Swedes to the right bank, assembled his troops on the left, at Dessau and Wittenberg. The French army remained almost motionless for about a fortnight in September and the beginning of October. My regiment bivouacked near Weissig on the heights of Pilnitz, these being occupied by one of our divisions of infantry. There was no official armistice, but both sides were tired and hostilities were *de facto* suspended, each side benefiting by this to prepare for new and more terrible combats.

At Pilnitz I received a letter from the colonel of Prussian cavalry to whom I had lent a horse when taken prisoner by my troopers at the beginning of the battle of Katzbach. He had been set free by his own side when the tide of fortune turned, but was none the less grateful for what I had done for him. In order to prove it he sent me ten troopers and a lieutenant of my regiment, who had been wounded and taken prisoners. Herr von Blankensee, for that was his name, had had their wounds dressed, and, after taking every care of them for a fortnight, had obtained leave to have them escorted to the French outposts, and forwarded them to me with many thanks, assuring me that he owed me his life. I believe he was right, but I felt none the less this expression of gratitude from one of the enemy's commanding officers.

While we were encamped at Pilnitz, a curious thing took

place in the sight of the whole division. A corporal of the 4th Chasseurs had in a drunken moment insulted his lieutenant, and a lancer of the 6th, being savagely bitten by his horse and unable to make it let go, had struck it in the belly with a pair of shears, thereby killing it. Both men certainly deserved punishment, but only as a disciplinary measure. General Exelmans by his own authority condemned them to death, and having made the division mount to be present at the execution, he drew them up on three sides of a large hollow square, two pits being dug on the fourth side, and the criminals placed in front of them. I had been riding about all night, and returned to camp at that moment. On seeing the melancholy preparations I had made sure that the offenders had been duly tried. I soon found out that it was not so: and on going up to a group formed by General Exelmans, the two brigadiers, and all the colonels, I heard M. Devance, of the 4th Chasseurs, and M. Perquit, of the 6th Lancers, entreating the general to pardon the two offenders. Exelmans refused; walking up and down in front of the troops while they were begging for clemency. I have never been able to refrain from expressing my indignation at the sight of an act which seems to me unjust. I may have been wrong, but addressing Colonels Devance and Perquit, I told them that they were lowering their dignity by permitting men of their regiments to be marched through the camp as criminals without having been tried. I added, 'The Emperor has granted power of life and death to no one, and has reserved that of pardoning to himself.' On seeing the effect produced by my outbreak, General Exelmans was moved, and called out that he forgave the chasseur, but that the lancer would be shot. That is to say, he pardoned the soldier who had insulted his lieutenant and meant to execute the man who had killed a horse.

To put the poor fellow to death, two sergeants were called for from each regiment; but as sergeants have no carbines, they had to take those belonging to some of the men. When the order reached me I made no answer to my adjutant, so no man of the 23rd presented himself to take

part in the execution. General Exelmans perceived it and said nothing. A report rang out, and all the spectators groaned with indignation. Exelmans ordered that, according to custom, the troops should file past the corpse; the march began. My regiment was second in the column, and I was just debating whether I ought to make it pass the body of the unhappy victim of Exelmans' severity when shouts of laughter were heard proceeding from the 24th Chasseurs, who had already reached the place of execution. I sent a staff-sergeant to find out the cause of this indecent mirth in presence of a corpse, and I soon learnt that the dead man was doing very well. In fact all that had taken place was merely a farce invented to frighten any soldiers who might be tempted to fail in their discipline—a farce which consisted in shooting a man with blank cartridges. In order that the secret of this sham execution should be better kept, our chief had entrusted the duty to sergeants and had had cartridges containing only powder served out to them; but as in order to complete the illusion it was necessary that the troops should see the corpse, Exelmans had told the lancer to fall face forwards as soon as they fired, to sham dead, and to leave the army the next night in peasant's clothes, and with a little money given to him on purpose. But the soldier, a crafty Gascon, knew quite well that Exelmans was exceeding his powers, and had no more right to shoot him without trial than to send him away without leave. So he remained standing after the discharge, and refused to go away unless he was given a passport, and guaranteed against arrest by the gendarmes. On learning that it was this discussion between the general and the supposed dead man which had excited the merriment of the 24th, I did not choose that my regiment should take part in this comedy, which in my view was far more contrary to discipline than were the faults which it was intended to check. So I made my squadrons wheel, and trotting off, I brought them away from this unpleasant scene back to their camp, where I made them dismount. All the generals and colonels having followed this example, Exelmans remained alone with the dead man, who calmly took his way

back to his bivouac, where he at once set to work to eat his soup with his comrades amid renewed peals of laughter.

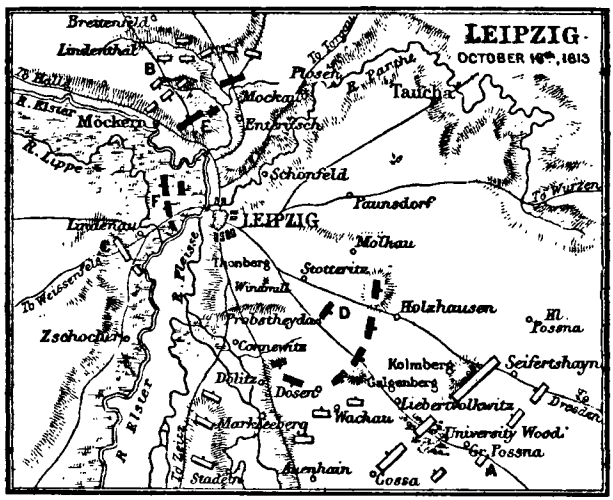
During our stay at Pilnitz, the enemy was receiving strong reinforcements, notably 60,000 Russians under Benningsen. These came from beyond Moscow, and included many Tartars and Bashkirs, armed only with bows and arrows. I have never understood with what object the Russian Government brought up from so great a distance these masses of irregular cavalry, who could be of no use against troops armed in the modern fashion, and only made food more scarce for the regular troops. Our soldiers were in no way impressed by the sight of these half-savage Asiatics, whom, from their bows and arrows, they nicknamed 'the Cupids.' The newcomers, however, who had never seen Frenchmen, encouraged by officers nearly as ignorant as themselves, expected to see us fly at their approach. The very day after their arrival they assailed our troops in countless bands, but were received with musketry-fire, and left many of their number dead on the ground. Their losses seemed only to excite them further; and as any ground suited them they began wheeling round us like swarms of wasps, and it was hard to catch them. When our troopers did get at them, the execution was considerable. Still, as the Russians took advantage of the disorder into which they threw our line to support them by detachments of hussars, the Emperor ordered the generals to keep a redoubled watch and to visit the outposts frequently.

Meanwhile, both sides were preparing to resume the hostilities which, as I have said, had been unofficially suspended. One morning, when our camp was perfectly quiet, just as I was in my shirtsleeves, preparing to shave myself before a little mirror hung to a tree, I felt a tap on the shoulder. Looking round sharply to see who in my regiment had taken this liberty with his colonel, I beheld the Emperor. He had wished to examine the neighbouring position without alarming the enemy, and had gone the rounds with a single aide-de-camp, followed by some squadrons selected from all the regiments in the division. By his order, I took command

of this escort, and went about all day with him; nor had I any fault to find with him in the matter of kindness to me. As we were about to return to Pilnitz, we perceived some thousand Bashkirs galloping towards us at the full speed of their little Tartar horses. The Emperor had not seen them till now, and reined up on a rising ground, asking me to try and capture some. To this end, I placed two of my squadrons in ambush behind a clump of trees, bidding the rest march on. This trick would not have taken in Cossacks, but with the less experienced Bashkirs it answered perfectly. They passed close to the wood, and were pursuing the column when our squadrons dashed out, killing a good many, and capturing some thirty of them. I had them brought to the Emperor, who exhibited much surprise at seeing these wretched horsemen sent with only bows and arrows to fight European troops. These Tartars had Chinese faces, and wore strange dresses. When we got back to camp my men amused themselves by giving the Bashkirs wine. Charmed with this unwonted reception, they all got drunk, and expressed their satisfaction by such wonderful grimaces and capers that Homeric laughter, in which Napoleon shared, overcame all beholders.

On September 28 the Emperor reviewed our corps, and gave me proofs of exceptional favour; for, contrary to his usual practice of giving only one reward at a time, he made me officer of the Legion of Honour and Baron, and granted me a gratuity. Further, he heaped honours on my regiment, saying that it was the only one in Sébastiani's corps which had maintained good order at the Katzbach, had captured guns, and beaten the Prussians wherever it met them. The regiment owed this distinction to Marshal Macdonald's eulogy of it; at the time of the rout at the Katzbach he had taken refuge in its ranks, and shared in the firm charge by which it had driven the enemy back across the river. After the review, as the troops were on their way back to camp, General Exelmans passed along the front of my regiment, loudly complimenting it on the justice which the Emperor had done to its valour, and eulogising the merits of its colonel in a way which I can only call exaggerated.

Meanwhile, the French army was concentrating in the neighbourhood of Leipzig. The enemy was also marching on that town in a vast circle which contracted day by day; with the evident object of shutting up the French troops, and wholly cutting off their retreat.



A. *Army of Bohemia, under Schwarzenburg.* B. *Army of Silesia, under Blücher.*
C. *Austrians, under Gulay.*
D. *Napoleon (Guard), Poniatowski, Augereau, Lauriston, Macdonald, Victor, Kellermann.*
E. *Ney, Marmont.* F. *Bertrand.* G. *Regnier (Saxons).* H. *Bernadotte.*

CHAPTER XXXVIII

On October 14 a brisk cavalry engagement took place between our advance-guard and that of the Russians and Austrians, without decisive result; ending in that most absurd of warlike operations, a cannonade going on till nightfall, with no effect beyond the destruction of a good many men. Early next morning the Emperor reached Leipzig, leaving 25,000 men at Dresden under Saint-Cyr.

The exact facts about the battle of Leipzig will never be known. The fighting, which lasted several days, took place on a vast and complicated field, and the immense number of troops which took part in it belonged to different nations. It is on the French side that documents are chiefly lacking; so many commanders of army corps and divisions, as well as staff-officers, fell in the battle or were taken prisoners that their reports were never completed, and those which came to hand showed the hurry and disorder amid which they had been drawn up. In my own case, being colonel of a regiment, and compelled to follow all the movements of my division, I could not know what others were doing, as in the days when I was an aide-de-camp, and by carrying orders to different parts of the field was enabled to know something of the general plan of operations. I must therefore more than ever abridge my story, and confine myself to what is absolutely necessary in order to give a notion of the most important events in a battle which so powerfully influenced the destinies of Napoleon, France, and all Europe.

The ring of steel in which the enemy was preparing to enclose the French army was not yet completed round Leipzig, when the King of Wurtemberg thought it his duty to warn Napoleon that all Germany was, at the instigation of

the English, about to rise against him; and that as the troops of the Confederation would shortly desert him he would not have more than time to retire behind the Main. He added that he himself would be unable to avoid following their example, for he must at length yield to the pressure of his subjects and follow the torrent of public feeling in Germany.

Strongly affected by the advice of the ablest and most loyal of his allies, the Emperor had, it is said, the idea of retreating towards the hilly district of Thüringen and Hesse, and, covered by the Saale, allowing the Coalition to attack him in a difficult country. Had this plan been carried out, it might have saved Napoleon; but for that prompt action was needed before the enemy's armies were wholly joined and near enough to attack us on the retreat. The Emperor, however, could not make up his mind to abandon any part of his conquests, nor yet to let it be believed that he considered himself beaten. The great captain's excess of courage was our ruin: he overlooked the fact that his army, weakened by its heavy losses, numbered among its ranks many strangers who were only waiting the opportunity to betray him, and that in the broad plains of Leipzig he ran every chance of being overwhelmed by numbers. If, on the other hand, he had assumed a defensive position in the mountains, the approach of winter and the need of feeding their numerous forces would soon have compelled the enemy to break up, while the French army, protected in front and on the flanks by the natural difficulties of the country, would have had the fertile valleys of the Rhine and Neckar in its rear. At the very least, we should have gained time, and perhaps wearied out the allies till they desired peace. But Napoleon's confidence in himself and in his troops prevailed, and he decided to accept battle in the plains of Leipzig.

Hardly had this fatal decision been taken when a second letter came from the King of Wurtemberg, with the news that the King of Bavaria had come to terms with the Coalition, and that the united Austrian and Bavarian armies, under General von Wrede, were marching on the Rhine.

With much regret Wurtemberg had been compelled by the strength of this army to unite here with it; and the Emperor might therefore expect that before long 100,000 men would be investing Mainz and threatening the French frontier.

This unforeseen news led Napoleon to think that he had better return to his plan of retiring behind the Saale; but it was too late. The main force of the allies was by this time in presence of the French army, and too near for retreat to be possible without being attacked during the operation. He therefore determined to fight, though his whole force, French and allied, amounted only to 157,000 men, including 29,000 cavalry, while Schwarzenberg could dispose of 350,000 Russians, Austrians, Prussians, and Swedes, his cavalry being 54,000.

The town of Leipzig, one of the busiest and wealthiest in Germany, stands near the middle of the vast plain which extends from the Elbe to the Harz Mountains. The situation of this district has made it the principal theatre of war in Germany. The small stream of the Elster, almost insignificant enough to be called a brook, flows from south to north through a shallow valley amid marshy meadows. Being divided into many branches, it offers a serious obstacle to the operations of war, and requires a great many bridges for communication among the villages. The Pleisse, a still smaller stream than the Elster, flows about a league and a half from it, and joins it under the walls of Leipzig, while north of the town the Partha flows into it. Being thus at the confluence of these three streams, and almost surrounded on the north and west by their many arms, Leipzig is the key of the position. The town, which at that time was not very extensive, was surrounded by an old wall having four large and three small gates. The road to Lutzen, by Lindenau, formed the only communication open to the rear of the French army. It was on that part of the ground between the Pleisse and the Partha that the hardest fighting took place. A noticeable point is the Kolmberg, known as the Swedish redoubt, because in the Thirty Years' War Gustavus Adolphus had raised fortifications at that point.

The battle of Leipzig began on October 16, 1813, and lasted three days. Without going into the details of this memorable action, I think I ought to specify the principal positions occupied by the French army, which will also give a general idea of those of the enemy. Murat commanded our right wing, the extremity of which rested on the Pleisse, near the villages of Connewitz, Dölitz, and Mark-Kleeberg, which were occupied by Prince Poniatowsky and his Poles. Next to these, behind the village of Wachau, was Marshal Victor; Augereau's troops occupied Dosen. These corps of infantry were supported by cavalry under Kellermann and Michaud. The centre, under the immediate command of the Emperor, was at Liebertvolkwitz. It consisted of Lauriston's and Macdonald's corps of infantry with the cavalry of Latour-Maubourg and Sébastiani; my regiment, forming part of the latter general's corps, was posted facing the Kolmberg. The left wing, under Marshal Ney, was formed of Marmont's, Reynier's, and Souham's corps, supported by the Duke of Padua's cavalry. It occupied Taucha, Plaussig, and the banks of the Partha. A corps of observation, 15,000 strong, under General Bertrand, was sent to the further side of Leipzig to hold Lindenau and the road to Lutzen. At Probstheida, in rear of the centre, was the reserve, under Oudinot, consisting of the Old and Young Guard, and Nansouty's cavalry. The King of Saxony remained in the town of Leipzig with his own guard and a few French regiments.

During the night of the 15th, Marshal Macdonald had made a movement to concentrate on Liebertvolkwitz, but as it was not wished to let the Kolmberg fall into the enemy's hands before morning I was ordered to watch it till daybreak. It was a ticklish duty, since it involved advancing with my regiment to the foot of the hill while the army retired half a league in the opposite direction. I ran the risk of being surrounded and carried off with my whole regiment by the enemy's advance-guard. Their scouts could not fail to ascend the hill as soon as the first light of dawn should permit them to see what was going on in the plain. It was splendid weather, and one could see very well

by the starlight; but, as in such a case one can much more easily perceive from below men coming on to high ground than those above can see those below, I brought my squadrons as near as possible to the hill, and, after ordering perfect silence and stillness, awaited events. Chance very nearly produced one which would have been very fortunate for France and for the Emperor, and would have made me for ever famous. It happened thus.

Half an hour before the first light of dawn, three horsemen, coming from the enemy's side, slowly ascended the Kolmberg. They could not see us, while we plainly made out their outlines and heard their conversation. They were talking French; one was a Russian, the other two Prussians. The first, who appeared to be in authority, told one of the others to let *their majesties* know that there were no French at that point, and that they could come up, for in a few minutes all the plain would be visible, but that they must make the most of the time lest the French should send skirmishers in that direction. The officer to whom these words were addressed remarked that the escorts were still some way off. 'What matter?' was the answer, 'since there is no one but us here.' At this my troops and I redoubled our attention, and soon perceived on the top of the hill a score of officers, one of whom dismounted.

Although I certainly had had no expectation of capturing a great prize, I had warned my officers that if we saw any of the enemy on the Swedish redoubt, two squadrons should, at a signal which I would give with my handkerchief, work round the hill to right and left, so as to cut off anyone who should have ventured so near to our army. I was, therefore, very hopeful, but just then the over-eagerness of one of my troopers wrecked my plan. The man, having accidentally let his sword drop, instantly took his carbine, and, fearing to be left behind when I gave the signal for attack, fired into the group and killed a Prussian major. As you may suppose, in the twinkling of an eye all the enemy's officers, having no escort but a few orderlies, and seeing themselves on the point of being surrounded by us, galloped away. Our

people could not follow them far for fear of themselves falling into the hands of the escort, whom we could hear coming up. My men, however, captured two officers, from whom we could get no information, but afterwards I learnt from my friend, Baron von Stoch, that the Emperor Alexander of Russia and the King of Prussia were among the officers who had so nearly fallen into the hands of the French near the Swedish redoubt. If this had happened the destinies of Europe would have been changed. As, however, luck had decided otherwise, there was nothing left for me but to withdraw quickly towards the French army.

On October 16, at eight in the morning, the allied batteries gave the signal for attack. A brisk cannonade opened along all the line, and the allied army marched on us at all points. The action began on our right, where the Poles were driven back by the Prussians and abandoned the village of Mark-Kleeberg. On our centre, the Russians and Austrians six times attacked Wachau and Liebertvolkwitz, and each time were beaten with heavy loss. The Emperor, doubtless regretting the abandonment of the Swedish redoubt, whence the enemy was pouring a hail of grape upon us, gave orders to recapture the hill, which was promptly effected by the 22nd light infantry supported by my regiment.

After this success, the Emperor, being unable to produce any impression on the enemy's wing owing to the great extent of their front, resolved merely to keep them employed while he endeavoured to pierce their centre. To this end he sent Mortier with two divisions of infantry, and Oudinot with the Young Guard, towards Wachau, Drouot supporting the attack, which to some extent succeeded, with sixty guns.

On his side, Marshal Victor routed the Russian corps under Prince Eugene of Wurtemberg; but the latter rallied his troops at Jossa. At the same moment Lauriston and Macdonald debouched from Liebertvolkwitz, the enemy was put to flight, and the French took possession of the wood of Gross Possna.[1] In vain did the Austrian cavalry under Klenau, supported by a 'pulk' of Cossacks, endeavour to

[1] [Called the 'University Wood.']

restore the fight; it was charged and thrown into disorder by Sébastiani's corps, after desperate fighting, in which my regiment took part. I lost some men, and my senior major, M. Pozac, was wounded by a lance in the breast, in consequence of having omitted to adopt the customary protection of his rolled-up cloak.

Meanwhile, Prince Schwarzenberg, seeing his line badly shaken, brought up his reserves, upon which the Emperor determined to order a grand cavalry charge. Kellermann, Latour-Maubourg, and the dragoons of the guard took part in this, and the first overthrew a division of Russian cuirassiers, but, being taken in flank by another division, he had to retire to the high ground near Wachau, after capturing several stand of colours. Then Murat brought up the French infantry, and fresh fighting took place. The Prince of Wurtemberg's corps was broken again, and lost 26 guns. After this rough handling, the enemy's centre began to bend, and was on the point of being pierced, but the Emperor of Russia quickly brought up the cavalry of his guard, and they, catching Latour-Maubourg's squadrons in the disorder which always results from a charge pushed home, drove them back in their turn, and recaptured twenty-four of the guns. In this charge, General Latour-Maubourg had his leg shot off.

As neither side had so far gained any marked advantages, Napoleon, by way of a decisive stroke, launched on the enemy's centre his reserve, composed of all the Old Guard and a corps of fresh troops from Leipzig. But at that moment a regiment of the enemy's cavalry, which had made its way by design or accident to the rear of the French, caused some uneasiness among our troops. They halted and formed square to avoid a surprise, and before the cause of the alarm could be discovered night came on, and suspended operations at that point.

On our extreme right, General Merfeldt had during the whole day been vainly trying to get possession of the passage over the Pleisse, which Poniatowski's Poles defended. Towards evening, however, he succeeded in making himself master of the village of Dölitz, thus putting our right wing

in danger. But the chasseurs of the Old Guard, under General Curial, came up at the double, hurled the Austrians back over the river, taking several hundred prisoners, General Merfeldt himself falling, for the third time in his life, into the hands of the French. Although the Poles had allowed Dölitz to be taken from them, the Emperor thought it well, in order to inspirit them, to give a marshal's baton to their chief, Prince Poniatowski: he did not long enjoy the honour of bearing it.

On the other side of the Elster the Austrian general, Gyulai, had carried the village of Lindenau after seven hours' hard fighting. On hearing of this serious event, which endangered the retreat of the greater part of his troops, the Emperor ordered General Bertrand to attack Lindenau, and the position was recaptured with the bayonet.

On our left Ney's impatience nearly brought about a great disaster. That marshal, who was commanding the left wing posted according to the Emperor's orders, finding that by ten o'clock no troops were to be seen in front of him, of his own accord sent one of his army corps under General Souham to Wachau, where the fighting appeared to be hot. But during this ill-judged movement Marshal Blucher, who had been delayed, came up with the Army of Silesia, and captured the village of Möckern. Thereupon Ney was obliged, owing to the reduction of his force, to retire towards evening within the walls of Leipzig, and to confine himself to defending the suburb of Halle. In this engagement the French lost heavily, and a bad effect was produced on those of our men who in other parts of the field could hear the firing in their rear. Towards eight in the evening all firing ceased on both sides and the night was quiet.

This first day left victory undecided, but still it was in favour of the French, since, with forces far inferior, they had not only made headway against the Coalition, but had driven them from some of the positions which they had occupied the day before. On both sides preparations were made to renew the combat next morning, but, contrary to expectation, the 17th passed without any hostile movement taking place. The

allies were awaiting the arrival of the Russian army from Poland, and also the troops which Bernadotte, the Crown Prince of Sweden, was bringing up. Napoleon, on his side, regretted that he had rejected the proposals for peace made two months ago, but hoped for some result from a pacific message which he had sent the night before to the allied sovereigns by his prisoner, the Austrian general, Count Merfeldt. The sequence of events is sometimes very strange; this Count Merfeldt was the same man who, sixteen years before, had come to General Bonaparte, then commanding the Army of Italy, to sue for the famous armistice of Leoben. It was he who had brought back to Vienna the treaty of peace concluded between the Austrian Government and the Directory, represented by General Bonaparte. It was he who, during the night after the battle of Austerlitz, had carried from the Emperor of Austria to the Emperor of the French proposals for an armistice; and now that General Merfeldt's destiny brought him once more to Napoleon at the moment when Napoleon needed an armistice and a peace, there seemed an encouraging hope that the same emissary would again bring about the desired result. But things had advanced too far for the allied sovereigns to treat with Napoleon; the mere fact of his proposing it showed that he was in difficulties. Thus, although they had not been able to beat us on the 16th, they had still a hope of overwhelming us by a renewed effort with greater forces. They reckoned also on the defection of the German troops which were still among us, whose chiefs, all members of the Tugendbund, took advantage of the quasi-armistice of the 17th to agree upon the manner in which they should carry out their notable treachery. No reply was ever given to the message brought by Count Merfeldt.

Early on the 18th the army of the Coalition opened the attack. The 2nd cavalry corps, to which my regiment belonged, was posted as before between Liebertvolkwitz and the Kolmberg. The fighting was hottest towards our centre, where the village of Probstheida was attacked simultaneously by a Russian and a Prussian force. Both were repulsed with

heavy loss. But the combat went on at all points, and the Russians attacked Holzhausen, which Macdonald successfully defended. Towards eleven o'clock firing was heard beyond Leipzig, in the direction of Lindenau; and we heard that our troops had at that point broken the circle in which the enemy flattered himself that he had shut up the French army, and that General Bertrand was making his way in the direction of the Rhine. The Emperor then gave orders that the baggage should be withdrawn towards Lutzen.

Meantime the plain was the scene of a fierce engagement about Connewitz and Lössnig; and the earth shook with the thunder of a thousand guns. The enemy tried to force the passage of the Pleisse, but were repulsed, though the Poles spoilt some of our finest cavalry charges. Then the 1st cavalry corps, seeing the Austrian and Prussian squadrons coming up to the aid of their allies, issued from behind Probstheida, broke the enemy and drove them back on their reserves, which were commanded by the Grand Duke Constantine. The allies at once brought up immense forces and tried to carry Probstheida, but the formidable masses were so well received by our infantry that they promptly recoiled. At this point we lost Generals Vial and Rochambeau; the latter had just been created marshal by the Emperor.

Up to this time Bernadotte had not fought against the French, and was said to be wavering. But at length, under the exhortations and even threats of Marshal Blucher, he decided to cross the Partha above the village of Mockau with his Swedes and one Russian corps.[1] A brigade of Saxon hussars and lancers was posted at this point, and, on seeing Bernadotte's leading Cossacks approach, made as though to charge them; but they suddenly wheeled round, and forgetting the risk to which they were exposing their King, who was still in the midst of Napoleon's army, these scoundrelly Saxons turned their muskets and cannons against the French.

[1] The Count of Rochechouart gives a most picturesque description of his mission to Bernadotte, who, in the month of September, was still hesitating to pass the Elbe; and similarly describes his meeting on the battlefield of Leipzig with the Crown Prince of Sweden, 'superb in the thickest of the fire, with dead and wounded all round him.'

The head of Bernadotte's army marched along the left bank of the Partha towards Sellershausen, which Reynier was defending. That general, whose troops were almost entirely drawn from the German contingents, after witnessing the desertion of the Saxon cavalry had lost confidence in the infantry of the same nation and placed Durutte's cavalry near them to keep them in hand. But Ney, with over-confidence, bade him deploy the Saxons, and send them in support of a French regiment which was holding the village of Paunsdorf. Hardly, however, had the Saxons got away from the French troops, when, seeing the Prussian standards near Paunsdorf, they made off at full speed in that direction, led by General Russel, their unworthy chief. Some French officers, unable to imagine such treachery, thought that the Saxons were going to attack the Prussians, so that General Gressot, Reynier's chief of staff, actually hurried off to check what he took for over-eagerness; but he found that he had none but enemies before him. This desertion of an entire army corps not only produced an alarming gap in the French line, but rekindled the ardour of the allied forces, and the Wurtemberg cavalry instantly followed the example of the Saxons. Bernadotte welcomed the traitors into his ranks, calling upon their artillery to assist his; and even begged the English commissioner to lend him the battery of Congreve rockets which he had brought. These the former marshal of France directed upon the French.

No sooner was the Saxon corps in the ranks of the enemy than it notified its treachery by a volley from all its guns—the commander exclaiming that he had burnt half his ammunition for the French, and would now fire the rest at them! Therewith he launched a hail of projectiles at us, of which my regiment received a large share. I lost some thirty men, including Captain Bertin, a most deserving officer, whose head was taken off by a round-shot. And it was Bernadotte, a Frenchman, for whom the blood of Frenchmen had earned a crown, that gave us this finishing stroke!

Among this general disloyalty the King of Wurtemberg formed an honourable exception. As I have said, he warned

Napoleon that circumstances would force him to leave his cause; but even after taking this supreme decision, he carried it out with perfect loyalty, ordering his troops to take no action against the French without giving them ten days' notice. Even when he had become our enemy, he expelled from his army the general and several of the officers who had taken their troops over into the Russian ranks during the battle of Leipzig, and deprived the deserting regiments of all their decorations.

Meanwhile Probstheida continued to be the scene of a murderous struggle. The Old Guard was deployed in rear of the village, ready to aid its defenders. Bulow's corps, trying to advance, was crushed, but we lost General Delmas, a distinguished soldier and honourable man, who had fallen out with Napoleon at the creation of the Empire and lived ten years in retirement, but demanded to serve when his country was in danger. The French were maintaining their position all along the line. On the left, where Macdonald and Sébastiani had held their ground between Probstheida and Stotteritz in the teeth of frequent attacks from Klenau's Austrians and Doctoroff's Russians, we were suddenly assailed by a charge of more than 20,000 Cossacks and Bashkirs. Their efforts were chiefly directed against Sébastiani's cavalry, and in a moment the barbarians surrounded our squadrons with loud shouts, letting off thousands of arrows. The loss these caused was slight, for the Bashkirs are totally undrilled and have no more notion of any formation than a flock of sheep. Thus they cannot shoot horizontally in front of them without hitting their own comrades, and are obliged to fire their arrows parabolically into the air, with more or less elevation according to the distance at which they judge the enemy to be. As this method does not allow of accurate aiming, nine-tenths of the arrows are lost, while the few that hit are pretty well spent, and only fall with the force of their own weight, which is inconsiderable; so that the wounds they cause are usually trifling. As they have no other weapons, they are certainly the least dangerous troops in the world. However, as they were coming up in myriads,

and the more of these wasps one killed the more came on—the vast number of arrows with which they filled the air were bound sooner or later to inflict some severe wounds. Thus one of my non-commissioned officers, named Meslin, was pierced from breast to back by an arrow. Seizing it in both hands he broke it and drew the two portions from his body, but died a few minutes later. I fancy this was the only case of death caused by the Bashkirs' arrows: but I had several men and horses hit, and was myself wounded by the ridiculous weapon. I had my sword in my hand, and was giving orders to an officer. As I raised my arm to indicate the direction in which he was to go, I felt my sword unexpectedly checked, and perceived a slight pain in the right thigh. Looking down I saw that an arrow four feet long was sticking an inch deep in my right thigh, though in the excitement of the fight I had not perceived the wound. I got Dr. Parot to take it out and place it in the regimental ambulance, for I wished to preserve it as a curious relic; but I am sorry to say it has been mislaid. As you may suppose, I did not leave my regiment for so slight a wound: and, indeed, the moment was very critical. The reinforcements brought up by Bernadotte and Bluchen were attacking the suburb of Schönfeld, not far from the point where the Partha enters the town of Leipzig. Generals Lagrange and Friederichs repulsed seven assults on this important point, driving the allies from the houses which they carried. General Friederichs was killed in the combat; he was an excellent and brave officer, and had the further advantage of being the handsomest man in the French army. The enemy would, however, have probably captured Schönfeld, had not Marshal Ney flown to the support of that village. He himself received a contusion in the shoulder, which compelled him to leave the field.

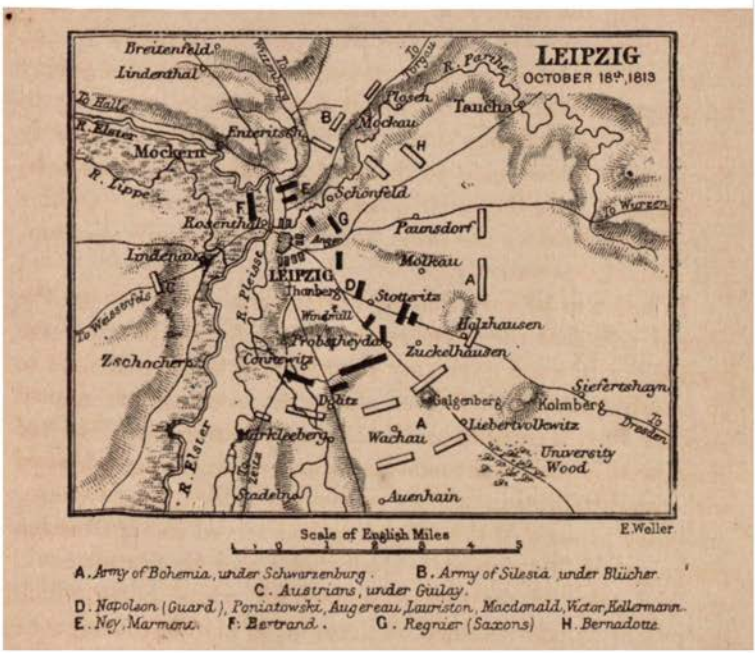
When night fell, the two armies were over most part of their lines in the same position as when the battle began. That evening my troopers, and indeed all Sébastiani's corps, tethered their horses to the same pickets which they had used for the three previous days, and most of the battalions occupied the same bivouacs. Thus this battle, so vaunted as a

victory by our enemies, was indecisive. We were inferior in numbers, with nearly all the nations of Europe against us and a crowd of traitors in our ranks, and yet did not lose an inch of ground. The English general, Sir Robert Wilson, who was present at Leipzig as British commissioner and whose evidence cannot be suspected of partiality, says: 'In spite of the defection of the Saxon army in the middle of the battle, in spite of the ardent and persevering courage of the allied troops, they could not carry a single one of the villages which the French proposed to hold as vital to their position. The action was closed by night, leaving to the French, and especially to the defenders of Probstheida, the glory of having inspired a generous envy in their enemies.'

When darkness came on, I received orders to bid the useless sharpshooting, which usually follows engagements, cease along the front of my regiment. It is not easy in these cases to separate the men who have just been fighting each other, all the more so that in order to prevent the enemy knowing what is done one cannot use drums or trumpets to sound the 'cease firing' and the 'recall,' but one has to give the word in a low voice to the section leaders, and they send sergeants to take the order quietly to the outposts. On his side, the enemy does the same, and the fire gradually slackens, and soon ceases entirely.

In order to be sure that no vedette was forgotten on the ground, and that the little retreat towards the bivouac was carried out in good order, my practice was to have it seen to by an adjutant. The one on duty that evening was named Captain Joly, a capable soldier and very courageous. He had given proof of this some months before, when, being entrusted with the distribution of the re-mounts which the Emperor presented to such of the officers as had served in the Russian campaign, M. Joly, in spite of all that I and his friends could say, had selected for himself a splendid white horse which the rest of us had declined on account of his too conspicuous vesture, and which I had at first assigned to the trumpeters. Now on the evening of the battle of Leipzig, as M. Joly was passing at a walk behind the skirmishing line, his white

horse was so plainly seen by the enemy, in spite of the darkness, that horse and man were both severely wounded. The captain was shot through the body, and died in the course of the night in a house in the suburb of Halle, where I had had Major Pozac taken the day before. His wound was not dangerous, but he was melancholy at the thought that the French army would probably retire and leave him in the hands of the enemy, who then would get possession of the sword of honour which he had received when a sergeant from the hands of the First Consul after the battle of Marengo. But I calmed his natural regrets by making myself responsible for the glorious sword. One of the surgeons of the regiment took charge of it, and it was handed back to Pozac when he returned to France.



CHAPTER XXXIX

In the calm of the night which fell on the fields of Leipzig after the terrible battle which they had witnessed, the chiefs on both sides could consider their position. Napoleon's was most unfavourable, and indeed if that great man has been blamed for not having retired behind the Saale a week before the battle, when he might still have avoided endangering the safety of his army, around which infinitely superior forces were about to form a ring of steel, it is with much greater reason that many soldiers have disapproved his dispositions when he allowed himself to be completely surrounded on the battle-field of Leipzig. I say completely, because, when Lichenstein's Austrians captured the village of Zschochern on the left bank of the Elster at 11 A.M. on the 18th, there was a moment when the road from Leipzig to Weissenfels, the only way of retreat open to the French, was intercepted, and Napoleon's army completely hemmed in. It is true this state of things only lasted half an hour, but was it prudent to expose himself to all the evils which might have resulted from it, and would it not have been better worth while, before the French army was surrounded by the united forces of the enemy, for its chief to have sheltered it behind the mountains of Thuringia?

We are now approaching a critical moment. The French had maintained their positions during the three days which the battle had lasted, but this success had only been obtained at the cost of much bloodshed, for they had had nearly 40,000 men disabled. The enemy had, it is true, lost 60,000, a difference which must be attributed to their persistency in attacking villages which we had entrenched, but as the number of their troops was infinitely greater than ours, our

army was proportionately far more weakened by its losses than theirs. It must be added that as the French artillery had in the three days fired 220,000 rounds our reserves were exhausted, and we had only 16,000 rounds left—enough, that is, for two hours' fighting. This lack of ammunition, which ought to have been foreseen before engaging superior forces at a distance from our frontier, rendered Napoleon incapable of giving battle again, and he was compelled to make up his mind to order a retreat.

It was no easy matter to carry this out. The ground which we occupied, being damp meadows with brooks between them and intersected by three streams, offered a number of small valleys, and these we had to pass close under the eyes of the enemy, who would find it easy to throw our march into disorder. There was only one way to secure our retreat: namely, the provision of a number of plank roads across the meadows, ditches, and watercourses, and of larger bridges across the three streams, especially the Elster, into which the others flow at the very gates of Leipzig. Nothing was easier to effect, since any amount of planks, beams, nails, &c., were close at hand in the town and suburbs.

The whole army was under the impression that all this had been done on its first arrival, and the work added to on the 17th when there was no fighting. But by a series of unfortunate circumstances, and by inconceivable neglect, no steps had been taken. Among the documents which are extant about the battle, there is absolutely no official statement to show that any measures had been taken, if a retreat was necessary, to facilitate the outflow of the columns from either the river valleys or the streets of Leipzig. No officer among the survivors, no author who has written on the battle, has been able to show that the chiefs of the army did anything to increase the number or the efficiency of the existing ways of communication. Only General Pelet, who pushed his admiration for Napoleon sometimes to the point of extravagance, wrote, fifteen years after the battle, that he had heard more than once from M. Odier, sub-intendant of the imperial guard, that he was present in the morning (he does

not say of what day) when the Emperor gave a general on the staff orders to attend to the construction of the bridges, specially charging him with that duty. General Pelet does not mention the name of the general officer to whom the Emperor gave that order—rather an important detail. Napoleon's secretary, M. Fain, says in his 'Memoirs' that the Emperor ordered several new passages across the marshes to be constructed in order to facilitate the crossing. How far posterity will admit the truth of these assertions, made long after date, I know not; but even supposing them accurate, many writers think that the head of the French army should not have been satisfied with 'giving orders' to a general, who, perhaps, had neither sappers nor materials at his disposal; but that several officers, at least one per regiment in every corps, should have been charged with the duty. One thing is certain—no one carried it out. The real reason, which at the time very few people knew, was as follows.

The Emperor's chief of the headquarters staff was Prince Berthier, who had been with him since the Italian campaign of 1796. He was a man of capacity, accuracy, and devotion to duty, but he had often felt the effects of the imperial wrath, and had acquired such a dread of Napoleon's outbreaks that he had vowed in no circumstance to take the initiative or ask any question, but to confine himself to executing orders which he received in writing. This system, while keeping the chief-of-the-staff on good terms with his master, was injurious to the interests of the army; for great as were the Emperor's activity and talents, it was physically impossible for him to see to everything, and thus, if he overlooked any important matter, it did not get attended to.

So it seems to have been at Leipzig. Nearly all the marshals and generals commanding army corps pointed out to Berthier, over and over again, the necessity of providing many passages to secure the retreat in the event of a reverse, but he always answered: 'The Emperor has given no orders.' Nothing could be got out of him, so that when, on the night of the 18th, the Emperor gave the order to retreat on

Weissenfels and the Saale, there was not a beam or a plank across a single brook.

The losses of the allies had been so great that they did not venture to attack afresh, and they were themselves on the point of withdrawing when they saw our heavy baggage being taken towards Weissenfels by way of Lindenau. Then they understood that Napoleon was preparing to retreat, and made their dispositions to profit by any chance in their favour which might result from his movement.

The most terrible moment of a retreat, especially for a commanding officer, is when he has to leave his wounded to the mercy of the enemy, who often have none, but plunder or put an end to the unhappy men who are unable to follow their comrades. However, as the worst thing of all is to be left lying on the ground, I had all my wounded taken up under cover of night and collected in two neighbouring houses, both to remove them from the first fury of the enemy, who would be flushed with wine, and to enable them to aid each other, and keep up each other's courage. M. Bordenave, assistant-surgeon, offered to remain with them. At the peace I got the Legion of Honour for that estimable doctor, by whose care many men's lives were saved.

Meanwhile, the troops were marching from that field which had witnessed their prowess and been watered by so much of their blood. The Emperor left his bivouac at 8 P.M., and took up his position in the town at the 'Prussian Arms' in the horsemarket. After giving his orders, he visited the King of Saxony, whom he found making arrangements to follow him. The King, a model friend, expected that, to punish him for his fidelity to the Emperor of the French, the allied sovereigns would deprive him of his crown, but he was most afflicted by the thought that his army had disgraced itself. Napoleon could not console the good old man, and only with difficulty persuaded him to stay at Leipzig and send one of his ministers to make terms with the Coalition. The Emperor then took leave of the King, the Queen, and their daughter. The parting was the more touching by the fact of news having come that the allies declined to enter

into any engagement as to the course they meant to take with regard to the Saxon monarch. He would, therefore, be at their mercy, and in his rich provinces they had strong motives for severity.

About eight o'clock in the evening the corps of Victor and Augereau, the ambulances, part of the artillery, the cavalry, and the imperial guard began to retreat. While they were passing through Lindenau, Ney, Marmont, and Reynier guarded the suburbs of Halle and Rosenthal. Lauriston, Macdonald, and Poniatowski entered the town and established themselves behind the gates, the walls of which had battlements. Thus all was ready for an obstinate resistance by the rear-guard, and the army was free to retreat in good order. Still, Napoleon, wishing to spare the town the horrors of street fighting, had allowed the magistrates to petition the allied sovereigns for an armistice of a few hours that the evacuation might be conducted with order. This humane proposal was rejected, and the allies, in hope of profiting by any disorder which might arise in the French rear-guard, scrupled not to expose one of the largest towns in Germany to total destruction. Then, in their indignation, several generals proposed to the Emperor to secure the retreat of his army by concentrating it within the town, and setting fire to all the suburbs except that of Lindenau. I think that the refusal to allow us to retreat unmolested justified us in employing all possible means of defence, and that as fire was the most effective we should have made use of it; but Napoleon could not make up his mind to it. This excessive magnanimity lost him his crown, for the fight which I am going to relate cost us nearly as many men as the three days' battle. Indeed, it was more disastrous, for it demoralised the army, which would otherwise have reached France in considerable strength; and the fine way in which our weak remnant opposed the allies for three months shows pretty well what we could have done if the survivors of the great battle had recrossed the Rhine without losing their arms and their organisation. France would probably have repelled the invaders.

But it was not to be so; for while Napoleon, with a too chivalrous generosity—mistaken, as I think—was refusing to burn an enemy's town and thus secure without a blow the safe retreat of his army, Bernadotte, the unworthy Crown Prince of Sweden, blaming the lack of zeal which his allies showed in the destruction of his fellow-countrymen, launched all his troops against the suburb of Taucha, captured it, and entered the town. Following his example, Blucher with his Prussians, the Russians, and the Austrians attacked the rear of the French columns in their retreat towards the Lindenau bridge over the Elster; and finally, to fill our cup full, a smart musketry-fire opened near that bridge, the only way of retreat open to our troops. This fire came from the battalions of the Saxon guard, who had been left in the town with their King. Regretting that they had not been able to desert with the rest of their army, and wishing to testify their German patriotism, they attacked the French in rear, before the palace of their sovereign. In vain did the unfortunate prince, appearing on the balcony, where the bullets were flying, exclaim to his officers and men, 'Cowards! kill me, your sovereign, and spare me the sight of your dishonour.' The scoundrels continued to assassinate the French, and the King, returning to his apartments, seized the colours of his guard and flung them into the fire.

The last kick was given to our troops by a Baden battalion which, being notorious for cowardice, had been left in the town during the battle to chop wood for the bakehouses. These miscreants, from the shelter of the windows of the great bakery, also fired on our soldiers, killing a great number. The French, meanwhile, made a brave resistance, defending themselves in the houses, and, in spite of their losses, disputing the ground foot by foot with the allied armies, while they retired in good order towards the bridge of Lindenau.

The Emperor had with difficulty got out of the town, and reached the suburb. At the last bridge, called the Mill-bridge, he dismounted, and not till then gave orders to charge the mine under the main bridge. Further, he sent orders to Ney, Macdonald, and Poniatowski to hold the town

twenty-four hours longer, so as to allow the artillery and baggage time to get through the suburb and across the bridges. Then he remounted; but he had hardly ridden a thousand paces along the road to Lutzen when a fearful explosion was heard. The great bridge over the Elster had blown up. And the troops under Macdonald, Lauriston, Reynier, and Poniatowski, with more than 200 guns, were still in Leipzig, and their retreat was wholly cut off. It was a climax to our disasters.

To explain this catastrophe, people said afterwards that Prussian and Swedish skirmishers had slipped along to the neighbourhood of the bridge, and, joining the Saxon guards, had taken possession of some houses, and begun to fire on the French columns; and that the sapper who had to fire the mine was misled into thinking that the enemy was coming up, and that the moment had come to blow up the bridge, and had therefore set fire to the powder. Others attributed the deplorable mistake to Colonel Montfort of the engineers, alleging that he had given the order in consequence of seeing the enemy's skirmishers. This version was adopted by the Emperor, who made a scapegoat of M. de Montfort, and ordered him to be brought to trial; but it was proved later on that he had nothing to do with it. Whatever the truth may have been, the army accused the chief-of-the-staff of neglect; and it was said with reason that he ought to have entrusted the guardianship of the bridge to an entire brigade, making the general personally responsible for giving the order to fire the mine at the proper moment. But Berthier defended himself with his usual answer: 'The Emperor had given no orders.'

After the destruction of the bridge, some of the French threw themselves into the Elster, in the hope of swimming across. Some succeeded, including Marshal Macdonald; but the greater number, Prince Poniatowski among them, were drowned, because when they had crossed the river they could not get up the muddy banks, which were lined, moreover, with the enemy's skirmishers. Those of our men who remained in the town, thinking only how to sell their lives

dearly, barricaded themselves behind the houses, and fought valiantly all the day and part of the night; but their ammunition failed, their hastily-raised entrenchments were forced, and nearly all were slain. The slaughter did not cease till two in the morning.

All this time the allied sovereigns, Bernadotte among them, assembled in the chief square, were relishing their victory, and deliberating how best to make sure of its results. The number of French massacred in the houses is reckoned at 13,000, and 25,000 were made prisoners. The enemy took also 250 guns.

After this general account of the events which followed the battle of Leipzig, I ought to tell you what specially befell my regiment, and Sébastiani's corps, to which it belonged. As we had for three days beaten off the enemy and held our part of the field, the troops were much astonished and grieved to hear on the evening of the 18th that for want of ammunition we were going to retreat. We hoped (and it seems to have been the Emperor's design) that he would at least go no further than beyond the Saale; where we might, in the neighbourhood of the fortress of Erfurt, replenish our powder wagons and recommence hostilities. We mounted then at 8 P.M. on October 18, and quitted the field where we had fought for three days, and where so many of our comrades had fallen with honour. Hardly were we out of our bivouac, when we felt the inconvenience arising from the neglect of the imperial staff to prepare for the retreat of so large an army. Every minute the columns were stopped by broad ditches, by marshes and brooks, which might so easily have been bridged. Horses and wheels stuck in the mud; and as the night was dark there were blocks everywhere. Our march was, therefore, very slow, and my regiment, being at the head of Exelmans', the leading division, did not reach the Lindenau bridge till 4 A.M. on the 19th. As we crossed it, we were far from foreseeing the frightful catastrophe which it was in a few hours to witness.

Day broke; the broad road was covered with troops of all arms in great number, which showed that the army would

be still strong when it reached the Saale. The Emperor came by; but as he galloped along the flank of the column he heard none of the acclamations which were wont to proclaim his presence. The army was ill-content with the little care which had been taken to secure its retreat; but what would the troops have said if they had known with how little foresight the passage of the Elster had been arranged? They had crossed it; but many of their comrades were about to find their deaths there. We were halting at Markranstadt, a little town three leagues from Leipzig, when we heard the explosion of the mine; but instead of being grieved, all rejoiced, for we doubted not that it had been fired to prevent the passage of the enemy after all our columns were safe across.

During the few hours' rest which we took at Markranstadt I was able to look at our squadrons in detail, and learn the losses of the regiment in the three days' fighting. I was horrified to find that they amounted to 149, of which sixty, including two captains, three lieutenants, and eleven non-commissioned officers, were killed; a terrible proportion out of 700, which had been the strength of the regiment on the morning of the 16th. Nearly all the wounds were caused by grape or round shot, which unhappily allowed small hope of recovery. But my losses would, perhaps, have been two-fold if I had not taken the precaution of keeping my regiment as much as possible out of artillery-fire. To explain this, I may point out that there are positions in which the most humane general finds himself under the painful necessity of exposing his men to the fire of cannon; but it also often happens that they are exposed quite unnecessarily, especially in the case of cavalry, who are able to move quickly from place to place. It is just in the case of large bodies of cavalry and on great battle-fields that precautions are most needed, but least taken. Now on October 16, at Leipzig, General Sébastiani having placed his three divisions between the villages of Wachau and Liebertvolkwitz, and indicated to each divisional commander approximately the ground which his division should take up, it fell to that of Exelmans to be posted

on undulating ground, broken into small mounds and hollows. The enemy's cavalry was a long way off, and therefore could not surprise us; and I took advantage of the hollows in the ground to cover my regiment. Thus sheltered from artillery-fire, and at the same time all ready to act, we had the satisfaction of seeing a great part of the day go by without our having a single man hit, while the regiments in our neighbourhood were losing pretty heavily.

I was congratulating myself on having placed my men so well when General Exelmans, on the plea that everyone should take his share of danger, ordered me, in spite of the remonstrances of my brigadier, to advance my regiment a hundred paces. I obeyed, and in a short time lost Captain Bertin killed and a score of men disabled. Then I tried a new plan, namely, to send troopers, well apart, to fire at the enemy's gunners with their carbines. This made the enemy also send out skirmishers, and when skirmishing was thus going on between the lines the enemy's guns could not fire on us for fear of hitting their own people. Ours were of course similarly hampered; but to get the artillery silenced on even a small part of the line was all in our favour, as the enemy was far superior in that arm. Moreover, our infantry was just then at close quarters with that of the enemy in the villages, and the cavalry on both sides had nothing to do but await the issue; so it was of no use for either side to be smashing up the other with cannon-balls. A skirmishing engagement, in which for the most part more powder is burnt than damage done, was a much better way of spending the time. Accordingly, all the colonels followed my example, and much bloodshed was saved. Still more would have been, if General Exelmans had not given the order to recall the skirmishers: which was the signal to the enemy to pour a hail of shot on our squadrons. Luckily it was near the end of the day.

This was the evening of the 16th. All the cavalry colonels of the 2nd corps approved so highly this plan of economising human life that we all agreed to employ it on the 18th. When the enemy's guns opened we sent out

skirmishers; and as these would have captured the guns had they been left undefended, our opponents had also to send out skirmishers, thus paralysing their artillery. The commander of the enemy's cavalry, probably divining our motive, did the same, with the result that on that day the artillery attached to the cavalry on both sides was much less employed. None the less we met in vigorous charges, but these had always a definite object, and in that case one must not spare oneself. But an artillery duel between two cavalry corps only leads to the useless slaughter of brave men. That was what Exelmans would not see, but as he was always rushing from one wing to another, as soon as he was a little way from a regiment the colonel would send out his skirmishers and the artillery would cease to speak. So persuaded were Sébastiani and all the cavalry generals of the merit of this plan, that Exelmans at last got orders to leave off teasing the enemy's gunners by firing at them when our squadrons were merely in observation. Two years later I employed the same system with the English artillery at Waterloo, and lost much less heavily than I otherwise should have done.

CHAPTER XL

WHILE the Emperor and the divisions from Leipzig were halted at Markranstadt came the disastrous news of the destruction of the Lindenau bridge. The army had lost by this nearly all its artillery; half the troops were left as prisoners, and thousands of our wounded comrades handed over to the outrage of the hostile soldiery, hounded on by its infamous officers to the slaughter.[1] Grief was universal, for each man had a relation or a friend to mourn. The Emperor appeared overwhelmed; but he ordered Sébastiani's cavalry to return as far as the bridge for the protection of individuals who might succeed in crossing the river at one point or another. My regiment and the 24th, being the best mounted, were ordered to lead the column and to go at full trot. General Wathiez being unwell, it fell to me, as senior colonel, to command the brigade. Hardly had we traversed half the distance when we heard frequent shots, and as we drew near the suburb we could distinguish the despairing cries of the unhappy French, who, unable to retreat, and without cartridges, were being hunted from street to street, and butchered in a cowardly manner by Prussians, Badeners, and Saxons.

The fury of my two regiments was indescribable. Every man breathed vengeance, and regretted that vengeance was almost impossible, since the Elster, with its broken bridge, lay between us and the assassins. Our rage increased when we met about 2,000 French, mostly without clothing, and nearly all wounded, who had only escaped death by leaping into

[1 It is only fair to the victors to say that eye-witnesses give a very different account of their conduct towards the wounded than these expressions would seem to imply. But probably they only indicate the temper of the French army at the moment.]

the river and swimming across under the fire from the other bank. Among them was Marshal Macdonald, who owed his life to his bodily strength and his practice in swimming. He was completely naked, and his horse had been drowned. I hastily got him some clothes and lent him my led horse, which allowed him to rejoin the Emperor at once and report the disaster he had witnessed, one of the chief episodes in it being the death by drowning of Prince Poniatowski.

The remainder of the French who had crossed the river, having had to get rid of their arms in order to be able to swim, were without means of defence; they were running across the fields to escape from some 400 or 500 Prussians and others, who, not content with the bath of French blood which they had had in the town and suburbs, had laid planks across the pieces of the exploded bridge and had come over to kill such of our unhappy soldiers as they could overtake on the road to Markranstadt. When I caught sight of this band of murderers I ordered M. Schneit, colonel of the 24th, to make a combined movement with my regiment, by means of which we enclosed these brigands in a vast semi-circle. Then I gave the order to sound the charge. The effect was terrible. The bandits, taken by surprise, offered only a feeble resistance, and there was a very great slaughter, for no quarter was given. So enraged was I, that before the charge I had vowed to run my sword through all who came within my reach. Yet when I was in the thick of them and saw that they were drunk, in disorder, and with no commanders but two Saxon officers, who trembled before the approaching vengeance, I saw that it was no case of fighting, but an execution, in which it did not become me to take a part. I dreaded lest I might actually find pleasure in killing some of the scoundrels with my own hand. So I sheathed my sword, and left the task of exterminating the assassins to my troopers. Two-thirds of them fell on the spot; the rest, among them two officers and several men of the Saxon guards, fled towards the bridge in hope of recrossing the river by the planks. But as they could only go in single file, and our men were pressing them hard, they made for a large inn

close by, whence they set to work to fire on my people, some Badish and Prussian pickets on the further bank aiding.

As it was probable that the noise of the fight might attract large forces towards the bridge, who, without crossing the river, could destroy my two regiments by musketry and artillery fire, I resolved to lose no time. I ordered most of my men to dismount, and taking a good supply of cartridges, to attack the inn in rear, and set fire to the stables and hay-lofts. On this, the assassins, finding themselves about to be caught by the flames, made an effort to escape; but as fast as they appeared at the gates the chasseurs shot them down. In vain did they send one of the Saxon officers to me: I refused to treat the monsters who had butchered our comrades as soldiers who surrendered honourably. The Prussian, Saxon, and Badish assassins who had crossed the foot-bridge were therefore all exterminated. I announced the fact to General Sébastiani, and he halted the other brigades half-way.

The fire which we had kindled soon reached the neighbouring houses. A great part of the village of Lindenau was burnt, and the reconstruction of the bridge and passage of the enemy's troops in pursuit of the French army thereby delayed.

Our expedition ended, I brought back the brigade to Markranstadt, as well as the 2,000 French who had escaped the disaster at the bridge. Among them were officers of all ranks. The Emperor questioned them as to what they knew regarding the explosion of the mine and the massacre of the French prisoners by the allies. It is probable that the sad tale made Napoleon regret that he had not followed the advice which had been given him that morning to secure the retreat of the army and prevent any attack from the enemy by setting fire to the suburbs, and, even, if necessary, to the town of Leipzig. I may say that nearly all the inhabitants had left the place during the three days' battle.

In our counter-attack at the bridge of Lindenau, only three men in my brigade had been wounded, and only one of my regiment, but he was one of my bravest and best non-commissioned officers, named Foucher. In the attack on the

inn a bullet had made four holes in him, passing through both his thighs. In spite of this severe wound, the brave Foucher went through the retreat on horseback, refused to go into hospital at Erfurt, and accompanied the regiment into France. His comrades and all the troopers of his section took, indeed, particular care of him, and in all respects he deserved it.

When I left Leipzig I was in fear for the wounded men of my regiment whom I had left there, among them Major Pozac. But, fortunately, the distant suburb in which I had left them was not visited by the Prussians.

You will remember that during the last day of the battle an Austrian corps had wished to cut off our retreat by occupying Lindenau, and the Emperor had caused General Bertrand's troops to drive it back. After thus reopening communications Bertrand had reached Weissenfels, and we fell in with him there. After the losses caused by the destruction of the Lindenau bridge, there could be no more thought of halting on the Saale, so Napoleon passed that river. A fortnight before the battle, that stream had offered him an impregnable position, which he had then despised, in order to risk a general engagement in an open country with three rivers in his rear, besides a large town with its narrow streets. The great captain had reckoned too much on his star, and on the incapacity of the enemy's generals. These did, indeed, commit such gross blunders that, in spite of their immense superiority in numbers, not only were they unable in three days to take a single one of the villages which we held, but I have heard the King of the Belgians, who then was serving in the Russian army, admit to the Duke of Orleans that the allies were on two occasions in such confusion that the order for retreat was given. However, the state of affairs changed, and it was our army which had to yield to misfortune.

After crossing the Saale Napoleon thanked and bade farewell to the officers and some troops of the Confederation of the Rhine who, whether from honourable feeling or for want of an opportunity to desert, were still in our ranks. He carried his magnanimity so far as to allow these soldiers to

retain their arms, although, as their sovereigns had joined his enemies, he had the right to detain them as prisoners. The French army continued its retreat to Erfurt, with no event except the combat of Kosen, where a single French division beat an Austrian army corps, and took its commander Count Gyulai prisoner.

Always beguiled by the hope of returning to the attack of Germany, in which case the fortresses which he was compelled to leave would be of great service to him, Napoleon established a strong garrison at Erfurt. He had left 25,000 men under Saint-Cyr at Dresden, 30,000 at Hamburg under Davout, while the various fortresses on the Oder and the Elbe were garrisoned in proportion to their importance. These were additional losses to those which Dantzig and the other places on the Vistula had already cost us. I need not repeat here what I have said about the inconvenience of distributing forces to hold places from which one is about to retire, but will merely say that Napoleon left in the fortresses of Germany 80,000 soldiers, not one of whom saw France again before the fall of the Empire; which they might, perhaps, have prevented if they had been united on our frontiers.

Our artillery repaired its losses in the arsenal of Erfurt. The Emperor, who up till then had borne his reverses with stoic fortitude, was affected by the desertion of his brother-in-law. Under the pretext of going to defend his kingdom of Naples, Murat left Napoleon, to whom he owed everything. Formerly so brilliant in war, he had done nothing remarkable during this campaign. It is certain that while he was still among us he had been keeping up a correspondence with Metternich, and the Austrian minister, placing before his eyes the example of Bernadotte, had, in the name of the allied sovereigns, guaranteed him the preservation of his kingdom if he would take his place among Napoleon's enemies. Murat left the French army at Erfurt, and no sooner had he reached Naples than he prepared to make war upon us.

At Erfurt also the Emperor heard of the audacious manœuvre of the Bavarians, his former allies, who, after

betraying his cause, had joined an Austrian corps, and marched, under command of General Wrede, with the intention not only of opposing the passage of the French army, but of taking it and the Emperor prisoners. Wrede marched for two days parallel with our army, and was already at Würzburg with 60,000 men. He detached 10,000 towards Frankfort, and with the remainder proceeded towards the small fortress of Hanau, with a view of blocking the road to the French. He had been with us on the Russian campaign, and thought to find the French army still in the wretched state to which cold and hunger had reduced it when it reached the Beresina; but we soon showed him that, in spite of our misfortunes, we still had some troops in good condition, and quite enough to beat the Austrians and Bavarians.

Not knowing that beyond Erfurt the allied troops whom we had fought at Leipzig had been following us only at a considerable distance, Wrede had become very enterprising, and thought to catch us between two fires. This he could not do; still, as several of the enemy's corps were seeking to outflank our right by way of the Franconian Mountains, while the Bavarians met us in front, our situation might become critical. Then Napoleon, rising to the height of the danger, marched briskly on Hanau, the approaches to which are covered by thick forests, and especially by the famous defile of Geluhausen, through which the Kinzig flows. This stream, the banks of which are very steep, runs between two mountains where there is only a narrow passage for the river, beside which a very fine road has been hewn out of the rock, going from Fulda to Frankfort-on-Main, by way of Hanau. Sébastiani's cavalry, which had acted as advance-guard from Weissenfels to Fulda, ought at that point where the road enters the mountains to have been replaced by infantry. I have never known for what reason that grand principle of war was not followed on this occasion; but, to our surprise, Exelmans' light cavalry division continued to march in front of the army. My regiment and the 24th were at the head, and I commanded the brigade. We learned from the peasants that the Austro-Bavarian army was already at

Hanau, and that a strong division was coming to meet us to dispute our passage through the defile.

My position as commander of the advance-guard now became very ticklish. How was I, without a single foot-soldier, and with my cavalry shut in between lofty hills and an impassable torrent, to attack infantry whose scouts could climb the rocks and shoot us down at point-blank range? I at once sent to the rear of the column to let the general know, but Exelmans was not to be found. So, as my orders were to advance, and I could not stop the divisions behind me, I marched on, until at an elbow in the valley my scouts reported that there was a detachment of the enemy's hussars in front. The Austrians and Bavarians had made the same mistake as our leaders. We had to attack with cavalry a long and narrow defile in which not more than ten or twelve horses could walk abreast, and they were sending cavalry to defend a place which a hundred light infantry could have held against any number of horse. I was rejoiced to see that the enemy had no infantry, and as I knew by experience that when two columns meet in a narrow place the advantage is always to the side that makes the charge, I sent my picked company ahead at full speed. Only the first section could touch the enemy, but it did it so thoroughly that the Austrian column was thrown into disorder, and my troopers had only to hold their swords straight.

We pursued for more than an hour. The enemy were Ott's regiment, and I never saw finer hussars. They were just from Vienna; and their uniforms, handsome, if a little theatrical, were as new and smart as you could wish. You might have thought they came from a ball-room or a theatre. Their brilliant costume contrasted strangely with the more than modest get-up of our chasseurs, many of whom were still wearing the clothes, stained with smoke and dust, in which they had bivouacked for a year and a half past; but brave hearts and sturdy limbs were inside them. The white jackets of Ott's hussars were soon terribly blood-stained, and the trim regiment lost more than 200 killed and wounded. Not one of ours was touched, as the enemy never had a chance of

turning round. Our men took a number of excellent horses and gold-laced jackets. So far all had gone well; but as I galloped after the stream of pursuers I was not without anxiety as to the end of this curious fight. The hills on each side of the stream were falling away, and it was clear that we were approaching the end of the valley. There we should probably find a plain full of infantry, and might have to pay dear for our success. Happily it was not so. On issuing from the defile we saw nothing but the cavalry, including the main portion of Ott's hussars, whom we had just handled so roughly, and who now drew along some fifteen squadrons with them in their headlong retreat on Hanau.

Then General Sébastiani made his three divisions of cavalry debouch. These were soon supported by the infantry under Victor and Macdonald, with several batteries; the Emperor and part of the guard presently appeared, and the remainder of the army followed. It was the evening of October 21. We bivouacked in a neighbouring wood, at not more than a league from Hanau and the Austro-Bavarian army.

CHAPTER XLI

WHAT had kept Exelmans at the rear during our passage of the defile was the following incident. Before entering the valley the scouts had brought in two Austrian soldiers who had straggled from their army, and were taken drinking in a lonely village. Exelmans had them questioned in German by one of his aides-de-camp, when, to his surprise, they answered in very good French. On his asking where they had learnt it so well, one of the wretches, who was half-drunk, thinking to make himself important, exclaimed that they were Parisians. Hardly had he uttered the words when the general, enraged at seeing Frenchmen in arms against their countrymen, ordered them to be shot on the spot. They were seized; but no sooner had the poor lad, who in order to show off had claimed to be French, been put to death, than his comrade, sobered by the sight, protested that neither of them had ever set foot in France. They had been born at Vienna of naturalized Parisian parents, and compelled, as domiciled in the Empire, to serve in the army, and to enter the regiment assigned to them. To prove the truth of what he said, he showed his papers and those of his unlucky comrade. Finally, yielding to the entreaty of his aides-de-camp, Exelmans consented to spare the innocent man.

Then, hearing the sound of the fight, the general wished to reach the head of my column; but so rapid was the pace at which the two regiments were pursuing the enemy, that he found it impossible to get within the ranks. After several attempts to do so, he and his horse were hustled into the Kinzig, where he was nearly drowned.

During the night the Emperor relieved the army very materially by sending all the baggage off to Coblentz,

escorted by some battalions of infantry and the cavalry of Lefebvre-Desnouettes and Milhau. On the morning of the 30th he had with him only Macdonald's and Victor's infantry, 5,000 bayonets in all, and Sébastiani's cavalry.

On the side by which we approached Hanau is covered by a great forest, through which the road passes; the trees of which are large enough to allow scarcely impeded movement. The town of Hanau is on the further bank of the Kinzig. General Wrede, who as a rule was not devoid of military talent, had committed the huge blunder of posting his army with the river in its rear; thereby depriving it of the support offered by the fortifications of Hanau. His only means of communication and retreat was by the bridge of Lamboy. No doubt the position which he occupied barred the road to Frankfort and to France, and he thought himself well able to stop us.

At daybreak on October 30 the battle began. It was like a great hunting expedition. A few rounds of grape, the fire of the infantry skirmishers, and a charge in loose order by Sébastiani's cavalry dispersed the enemy's first line, awkwardly posted on the edge of the wood. But when we had advanced a little further, our squadrons could only act in the few clearings, and the light infantry pursued the Bavarians singly, driving them from tree to tree till they got out of the wood. Then they were brought up by the enemy's line, 40,000 strong, with eighty guns in its front. If the Emperor had then had all the troops whom he brought away from Leipzig, a vigorous attack would have mastered the bridge, and Wrede would have paid dear for his rashness; but the corps of Mortier, Marmont, and Bertrand, and the great park of artillery had been delayed by the defiles, and Napoleon had only 10,000 combatants at his disposal. The enemy should have seized the opportunity for a brisk charge; but they did not venture it, and their hesitation allowed time for the artillery of the guard to come up. As soon as General Drouot, who commanded it, had fifteen pieces on the field he opened fire; and his line increased gradually, till it showed fifty guns. These he caused to advance

firing, though he had few troops to support him; but this, owing to the smoke of so great a battery, the enemy did not find out. At last, just as a puff of wind drove the smoke away, the chasseurs of the guard appeared.

At the sight of the bearskins the Bavarian infantry recoiled in consternation. Wishing to check the disorder at any cost, General Wrede made all the cavalry at his disposal charge our guns, and in a moment the battery was surrounded by a cloud of horsemen. But at the voice of their intrepid chief, who, sword in hand, was setting the example of a valiant resistance, the French gunners seized their muskets and remained immovable behind the carriages, whence they fired on the enemy at close quarters. Numbers would, however, have triumphed, but that at the Emperor's order the whole of Sébastiani's cavalry and that of the guard, grenadiers, dragoons, chasseurs, Mamelukes, lancers, dashed furiously on the enemy, killing a great number and dispersing the rest. Then, flying upon the squares of Bavarian infantry, they broke them with heavy loss, and the routed Bavarian army fled towards the bridge and the town of Hanau.

General Wrede, being a brave man, determined, before owning himself beaten by a force of half his own strength, to make a fresh effort. Assembling all his available troops, he attacked us unexpectedly. The musketry-fire suddenly drew near to us; again the forest re-echoed with the roar of the cannon, the balls whistled through the trees, bringing great branches down with a crash. The wood was too deep for the eye to penetrate; through the shade cast by the thick foliage of the huge beeches one could barely see the occasional flashes of the guns. On hearing the noise of this attack the Emperor sent off in that direction the grenadiers of his Old Guard, under General Friant. These soon repulsed this last effort of the enemy, who quickly left the field of battle and rallied under shelter of the fortress of Hanau. During the night they abandoned this also, leaving a great number of wounded, and the French occupied the place.

We were only two short leagues from Frankfort, where there is a stone bridge over the Main. Now, as the French

army had to march along this river to reach the French frontier at Mainz, Napoleon sent forward General Sébastiani's corps with a division of infantry to occupy Frankfort and destroy the bridge, he himself with the main army bivouacking in the forest. The high road from Hanau to Frankfort passes close along the right bank of the Main. My friend General Albert, who commanded the infantry which accompanied us, had been married some years before at Offenbach, a pretty little town on the left bank, exactly opposite the spot where, having emerged from the forest of Hanau, we rested our horses in the wide plain of Frankfort. Finding himself so near his wife and children, General Albert could not resist the desire to get news of them, and still more to reassure them of his safety after the battles of Leipzig and Hanau. To this end he exposed himself perhaps to more danger than in those sanguinary engagements. Advancing in uniform and on horseback to the edge of the stream, in spite of all we could say, he hailed a boatman who knew him. While he was talking to this man, a Bavarian officer, coming up at the head of an infantry picket, ordered them to make ready, and was about to fire on the French general. However, a number of inhabitants and of boatmen placed themselves in front of the muskets and stopped the soldiers from firing, for Albert was much beloved at Offenbach. As I looked at that town where I had just been fighting in my country's service I little thought that I should one day take refuge there from the proscription of the French Government, and should pass three years there in exile.

The Emperor, on leaving the forest of Hanau, had scarcely gone two leagues on the road to Frankfort when he learned that the battle had begun again behind him. The Bavarian general, who had feared after his defeat that the Emperor would stick to his heels till he had made an end of him, when he saw that the French army cared more about reaching the Rhine than about pursuing him, plucked up courage and made a smart attack on our rear-guard. But the corps of Macdonald, Marmont, and Bertrand, who had occupied Hanau during the night, received his army with the bayonet and

overthrew it with great slaughter. General Wrede was severely wounded, and his son-in-law, the Prince of Oettingen, was killed. The command of the enemy's army devolved on the Austrian general Fresnel, who gave orders for a retreat, while we continued our march to the Rhine unmolested, crossing it on November 2 and 3, after a campaign in which brilliant victories had been mingled with depressing reverses. The cause of these last was Napoleon's mistake in quarrelling with Austria instead of making peace after his victories in the month of June. All Germany followed, and Napoleon soon had the whole of Europe against him.

After our return to France the Emperor stayed only six days at Mainz, and then went to Paris—a prompt departure with which the army found fault. It was admitted that there were strong political reasons calling him to Paris; but it was thought that the duty of reorganising the army also had claims on him, and that he should have gone to and fro between it and the capital, for experience might have taught him that when he was absent little or nothing was done.

The last cannon-shots which I heard in 1813 were fired at the battle of Hanau, and that day went very near to be the last of my life. My regiment charged five times—twice upon infantry squares, once upon guns, and twice on Bavarian cavalry; but the greatest danger which I ran arose from the explosion of a wagon full of shells, which took place close to me. As I have said, the Emperor ordered the cavalry to make a general charge at a very difficult moment. Now, in such a case, it is not enough for a commanding officer, and especially when he is engaged in a forest, to send his regiment straight forward, as I have seen many do; he must cast a rapid glance over the ground to which his squadrons are coming, so that he may not lead them into swampy places. I marched, therefore, some paces in front, followed by my regimental staff, and having beside me a trumpeter who signalled, as I bade, the obstacles which the various squadrons would find in front of them. Although the trees stood wide apart, the passage through the forest was difficult for cavalry, because the ground was piled with men and horses killed or

wounded, and with weapons, guns, and wagons which the Bavarians had left. It is easy to see that it is difficult in such a case for a colonel, as he gallops amid bullets and cannon-balls, to examine the ground which his squadrons have to cross, and at the same time take any thought for his personal safety. I had to leave this to the intelligence and nimbleness of my excellent horse Azolan; but the small group which followed me close had been greatly thinned by a discharge of grape, which had wounded many of my orderlies, and I had only my trumpeter near me, when suddenly from the whole line I heard shouts of 'Colonel! colonel! look out!' and ten paces from me I saw a Bavarian artillery wagon which one of our shells had just set on fire. A huge tree which had been cut down by the cannon-balls barred the road in front of me. To go round would have taken me too long. I called to the trumpeter to stoop, and, lying flat over my saddle-bow, I took my horse at the jump. Azolan made a long leap, but not long enough to clear all the branches, and his legs got caught among them. Meantime the wagon was blazing and the powder would take fire in a moment. I gave myself up for lost, when my horse, as though he had understood our common danger, began bounding four or five feet high, always getting further from the wagon, and as soon as he was clear of the branches he went off at such a stretching gallop that he was almost literally *ventre à terre*. I shivered when the explosion took place, but I must have been out of the reach of the bursting shells, for neither my horse nor I was touched. It was otherwise with my young trumpeter, for when the regiment resumed its march after the explosion they saw the poor fellow dead and horribly mutilated by the splinters. His horse also was blown to pieces. My brave Azolan had saved me already at the Katzbach, and now I owed him my life a second time. I caressed him, and, as though to show his joy, the poor animal whinnied aloud. There are moments when one is led to believe that some creatures have far more intelligence than is generally thought.

I keenly regretted my trumpeter, who was beloved by the

whole regiment no less for his courage than for his general behaviour. He was the son of a professor at the college of Toulouse; had been through his course there, and took great delight in spouting Latin. An hour before his death the poor lad, having observed that nearly all the trees in the forest of Hanau were beeches, and that their spreading branches formed a kind of roof, found it a suitable occasion to repeat the Eclogue of Virgil which begins with the verse

Tityre, tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi.

Marshal Macdonald, who happened to pass at the moment, laughed heartily, exclaiming, 'There's a little chap whose memory isn't disturbed by his surroundings! It is certainly the first time that anyone has recited Virgil under the fire of the enemy's guns.'

'He who takes the sword shall perish with the sword,' says the Scripture. If this saying does not apply to all soldiers, it did to many of them under the Empire. M. Guindet, who in October 1806 had killed Prince Lewis of Prussia at Saalfeldt, was himself killed at the battle of Hanau. No doubt it was the fear of a like fate which led the Russian general Czernicheff to fly from the danger. You will remember that early in 1812 that officer, then a favourite aide-de-camp of the Emperor Alexander, happening to be at Paris, had abused his position to corrupt two poor officials in the War Office.[1] They were executed for selling information about the French army, while the Russian colonel only avoided the punishment which he deserved by secretly escaping from France. On returning to his own country, M. de Czernicheff, though more of a courtier than of a soldier, became a general, and in that capacity commanded a Cossack division, the only Russian troops at Hanau. The part its leader played there made him the byword of the Austrians and Bavarians who were present at that fight. So long as Czernicheff expected to meet none but sick and demoralised troops, he crowed loudly; but he changed his tone when he found himself face to face with the veterans from Leipzig. General

[1 See p. 201.]

Wrede had at first much trouble to make him take his place in the line, and no sooner did he hear the roar of our artillery than with his 3,000 horsemen he trotted away from the battle-field, amid the hootings of the Austrians and Bavarians. General Wrede hurried up in person to reproach him. Czernicheff replied that his horses wanted food, and that he was going to bait them in the neighbouring villages. This excuse was thought so ridiculous that before long the walls of nearly every town in Germany were covered with caricatures representing Czernicheff feeding his horses on bundles of laurel gathered in the forest of Hanau. The Germans can be caustic sometimes.

The remnants of the French army expected when they crossed the Rhine that their hardships would be at an end as soon as they were on their native soil; but they were greatly mistaken. The Government and the Emperor himself had so reckoned on our success that no arrangements had been made to receive the troops at the frontier and reorganise them. On the very day of our entry into Mainz the men and horses would have had no food if they had not been billeted about in the neighbouring towns and villages. The inhabitants, however, had had no experience of feeding soldiers since the old Revolutionary wars. They complained loudly, and in fact the charge fell too heavily on the communes.

The sick and wounded were established as well as circumstances permitted in the hospitals of Mainz, and in order to watch the line of the Rhine from Basle to Holland all able-bodied men joined the nuclei of their regiments, and the divisions and army corps, sadly weakened, were distributed along the river. My regiment, with what was left of Sébastiani's corps, went down the Rhine by easy marches. The weather was splendid, and the country lovely; but we were all heart-broken, foreseeing, as we did, that France was going to lose these fair countries, and that her misfortunes would not stop there.

After passing some time at Cleves and Urdingen, we went on to Nimeguen. On the further bank we could see the

Dutch and German population tearing the French flag from their towers and replacing those of their old sovereign. Amid our melancholy thoughts the colonels did their best to reorganise their few remaining troops; but we could do little for want of supplies. Moreover, the necessity of feeding the army forced the Emperor to keep it scattered; while in order to organise it, it should have been concentrated. Meanwhile the enemy required time to recover from the rough handling we had given them, and were in no condition to cross the Rhine and interfere with our reorganisation. They left us alone, therefore, throughout November and December, and I passed those months chiefly on the banks of the Rhine with the phantom of an army corps commanded by Macdonald.

At length all the colonels received orders to take all their men who were unmounted to the depôts of their regiments, and that of the 23rd Chasseurs being still at Mons, I went there. There I saw the eventful year 1813 out—a year in which I had borne many toils and incurred many dangers. But before concluding my account of it I must briefly describe the closing events of the campaign.

CHAPTER XLII

THE German fortresses in which we had left garrisons were soon invested, and some of them besieged. By the end of 1813 only four were still standing. These were Hamburg, where the intrepid Davout succeeded in holding the place till the Emperor abdicated and the garrison was recalled to France; Magdeburg, which General Le Marois also held till the end of the war; Wittenberg, which was bravely defended by old General Lapoype, and taken by assault on January 12; and, lastly, Erfurt, which had to capitulate for want of provisions. All the other fortresses had already fallen into the hands of the enemy. In the case of Dresden and Dantzig, their occupation was discreditable to the allied armies. When, after the battle of Leipzig, Napoleon was retreating to France with the remnants of his army, leaving 25,000 men at Dresden under Saint-Cyr, the marshal endeavoured to cut his way through the blockading force. Several times he drove them back, but at length, overwhelmed by superior forces, and short of provisions, he was constrained to accept an honourable capitulation. The terms were that the garrison should retain their arms, that they should not be prisoners of war, and should return to France by regular marches. The marshal would have preferred that his troops should march as a united army corps, and bivouac together every night, which would have allowed them to defend themselves in the event of treachery; but the enemy's generals pointed out that the country was too much exhausted to furnish rations for 25,000 men in the same place; and, yielding to necessity, the French marshal agreed to divide his force into columns of 2,000 to 3,000 men, who marched one or even two days' journeys apart.

During the first days all went on as it should; but as

soon as the last column was out of Dresden, having handed over the forts and the munitions of war, the allied generals declared that they had no power to sign the capitulation without the consent of the generalissimo, Prince Schwarzenberg, and that as he would not ratify it it was null and void. They offered, indeed, to let our troops return to Dresden, putting them in exactly the position in which they were on the day of the capitulation, that is, with provisions for a few days only. But so long as the French occupied the place they had concealed their destitution; now that the enemy knew it, their offer was, of course, illusory. Our troops were indignant at this breach of faith; but what could they do? The enemy had taken care to surround our isolated detachments with battalions, posted previously at the places where the news of the breach of the capitulation would reach the various columns. Resistance was out of the question, and our people were under the sad necessity of laying down their arms.

After the treachery committed on the field of Leipzig came the breach of capitulations, which up to then all civilised nations held sacred. None the less have the Germans chanted 'Victory'; for everything, even dishonour, seemed to them allowable in order to crush Napoleon. All the allied sovereigns having adopted this new and iniquitous law of nations, they put it in force with regard to the garrison of Dantzig. After a vigorous defence of that place, General Rapp was forced, by want of provisions, to surrender, on condition that the garrison should return to France. Yet, in spite of the treaty signed by the Prince of Wurtemberg, who commanded the besieging army, this condition was basely violated, and the brave defenders of Dantzig, to the number of 10,000, were sent as prisoners into Russia, where most of them perished from their hardships.

A conspicuous feature of that siege was the conduct of an infantry captain in the garrison, M. de Chambure. This brave and intelligent officer obtained leave to form a 'free company,' composed of picked volunteers. This band undertook the most venturesome enterprises. It used to go at night and surprise the besiegers' outposts, penetrate within

their trenches, destroy their works, spike their guns, and go out into the country to plunder their convoys. One night, Chambure took boat with his men, surprised a Russian cantonment, set fire to an ammunition train, destroyed several magazines, killed or wounded more than 150 men, and returned in triumph with a loss of only three. Not long after, he attacked a breaching battery, captured it, and spiked the guns. Then, uniting banter to courage, he left in the muzzle of a mortar a letter to the Prince of Wurtemberg, to this effect: 'Prince: as your shells spoil my sleep, I have had to come and spike your mortars. Do not wake me any more, or I shall be obliged to come and see you again.' He did, indeed, come again more than once, and spread a panic among the enemy's sappers and gunners. Horace Vernet has made his name popular by a picture of him in the act of depositing his letter in the mortar.

The frequent desertions which took place at this time remind me of the following anecdote.[1] Among the generals who served under Washington in the War of American Independence, the bravest, most able, and most esteemed by the army was General Arnold. He had lost a leg in battle, and yet such was his patriotism that he continued to fight against the enemies of his country. Ultimately, however, having quarrelled with Washington, on account of some supposed favouritism, he deserted and took service in the British army, becoming one of the most dangerous enemies of his countrymen. Some time afterwards an armistice was signed. Several American officers advanced between the two camps, and were met by some English officers, among whom was General Arnold. A friendly conversation ensued, until Arnold, perceiving that his former friends were displeased at his presence, remarked that he was surprised at this, for though he was fighting against them

[1] Many regrettable desertions took place, even among officers, from the garrisons of the fortresses, notably from that of Dresden, which was composed of troops belonging to different nations. The deserters were warmly welcomed in the Russian camp, and fought against us during the subsequent campaign in France.

now, they should not forget that he had lost a leg in the American service. Upon this an American replied, 'We remember it quite well, and if ever you fall into our hands your wooden leg shall be deposited in the Capitol to remind our descendants of the heroic courage you displayed when fighting for the independence of your country, after which we shall hang the remainder of you on a gallows as a warning to traitors.'

But let us return to the situation of the French armies in December 1813. Spain, the original cause of the catastrophe which marked the end of Napoleon's reign, had been stripped of a great many of the best troops, who were required to reinforce the army in Germany. There were, however, still more than 100,000 men in the Peninsula—enough to keep the enemy in check if Napoleon had left Marshal Soult in command. But as he was determined to turn his brother Joseph into a general capable of defending the kingdom which he had given him, the Emperor entrusted the command of the army in Spain to that highly estimable but very unmilitary prince. It is true he gave him Marshal Jourdan as chief of the staff; but Jourdan was prematurely old, and had seen no service since the early days of the Revolution. He was worn out, morally and physically, and inspired no confidence in the troops. Thus, in spite of the ability shown by Suchet, Reille, Foy, Clausel, and other generals who served under King Joseph, the Anglo-Portuguese armies commanded by Lord Wellington, and assisted by the Spanish guerrillas, inflicted on us irreparable losses. The French had been compelled to leave Madrid, recross the Ebro, and concentrate their main forces round the town of Vittoria. Attacked in that position by an army three times greater than their own,[1] they lost a battle all the more disastrous in its results that King Joseph and Marshal Jourdan had taken no precautions to secure the retreat. The king's carriages, those of a number

[1 The Anglo-Portuguese army numbered somewhat over 83,000, with 90 guns. The French muster-roll was lost in the battle, but Soult had probably about 60,000 combatants, and 143 of his guns were captured (Napier).]

of Spaniards who had taken his side, and were flying from the vengeance of their countrymen, parks of artillery, treasure wagons, everything was in confusion, and the regiments had much difficulty in making their way through. They did not, however, break up, and, in spite of the vigorous attacks of the enemy, the bulk of the army succeeded in retreating to Pampeluna. The battle of Vittoria did credit to the ability and courage of General Clausel, who rallied and directed the army. In that unhappy day the French lost 6,000 killed. wounded, and prisoners, and left most of their artillery, and nearly all their baggage, in the enemy's hands.

In spite of this check our troops might have maintained their footing in Navarre, but King Joseph ordered them to retreat beyond the Bidassoa, directing General Foy, who commanded the rear-guard, to destroy the bridge. Thus, by the end of June we had abandoned Spain in that direction. Marshal Suchet still held out in Aragon, Catalonia, and the kingdom of Valencia, but after the battle of Vittoria Wellington was able to send reinforcements to the south of Spain, and Suchet had to evacuate Valencia, both kingdom and city.

At this moment the Emperor was still triumphant in Germany. As soon as he learned the state of affairs beyond the Pyrenees he hastened to revoke the powers he had given to Joseph and Jourdan, and appointed Marshal Soult his lieutenant-general over all the Spanish armies. After reorganising the divisions Soult made a great effort to succour the French garrison left in Pampeluna; but the place was obliged to capitulate, and he had to take his troops back across the Bidassoa. The fortress of St. Sebastian, under its brave governor, General Rey, held out for a long time; but it was finally taken by assault, and the English and Portuguese, oblivious of all humanity, pillaged, violated, and massacred the unhappy inhabitants, allies though they were. The English officers took no steps to put a stop to these atrocities, which, to the disgrace of Wellington, his generals, and the English nation, went on for three whole days.[1]

[1] Readers of Napier will remember the indignant tone in which he speaks of the atrocities committed by some of the English and Portuguese

Foot by foot Soult defended the Pyrenees, and beat Wellington several times; but the superior forces at the disposal of the latter allowed him to return incessantly to the attack, until he succeeded in establishing himself within our frontiers, and fixing his headquarters at St. Jean de Luz, the first French town, which had never been lost to France, either by the defeats of Francis I. or the disastrous wars at the end of the reign of Louis XIV.

It is hard to believe that after the desertion of the German troops at Leipzig Marshal Soult should have thought that he could keep German soldiers in the Army of the Pyrenees. In one night they all went over to the enemy and increased Wellington's forces. However, Soult collected several divisions under the ramparts of Bayonne, and attacked the English again. On December 9 a battle began which lasted five days, and was one of the most bloody of the war. It cost the enemy 16,000 men, and the French 10,000; but they, nevertheless, took up their position again round Bayonne.

Before this, Marshal Suchet, having heard in October of Napoleon's reverses in Germany, understood that he could no longer hold out in the south of Spain, and prepared to draw nearer to France. Retreating on Tarragona, he blew up the ramparts, and added the garrison to his army. His retreat, though molested by the Spaniards, was effected in good order, and by the end of December 1813 he and his troops were established at Gerona.

To complete our view of the situation of the French armies at the end of 1813, we must remember that in the spring of that year the Emperor had assembled in Tyrol, and in his kingdom of Italy, a numerous army under his stepson, Eugène Beauharnais. That prince was a man of a kind and gentle disposition, and very devoted to the Emperor; but, though a far better soldier than Joseph, he fell very far short of being fit to command an army. On this point the Emperor was misled by the affection he felt for him. On

soldiers at the capture of St. Sebastian, and also the manner in which English and Portuguese officers, at the risk, and in some cases at the cost, of their own lives, exerted themselves to get the men in hand again.]

August 28, the day on which the armistice between Napoleon and the allies was to end in Germany, the Austrians, who had hitherto been neutral, declared themselves our enemies beyond the Alps. Hostilities were never very active, for the chiefs on both sides understood that the success of the campaign would depend upon the result of events in Germany. Still there were frequent combats with varying fortunes; but the superior forces of the Austrians, who were soon joined by an English corps, ultimately compelled the viceroy to withdraw the Franco-Italian army across the Adige.

In November came the news of the defection of Murat, King of Naples. The Emperor, to whom he owed everything, could not at first believe it; but it was only too real. Murat had joined his flag to that of Austria, and his troops were already in occupation of Bologna. Such is the fickleness of Italians that they everywhere greeted the Austrians and Neapolitans, whom they had hated before, and soon afterwards hated still more bitterly. In December the viceroy's army, 43,000 strong only, occupied Verona and the neighbourhood.

On seeing all Europe in coalition against him Napoleon could not hide from himself that the first condition of peace imposed on him would be the re-establishment of the Bourbons on the throne of Spain. He resolved, therefore, to do of his own proper motion what he foresaw he would presently be compelled to do. He restored King Ferdinand VII. to liberty, and ordered Suchet's army to retire on the Pyrenees.

Thus at the end of 1813 we had lost all Germany, all Spain, and most of Italy; while Wellington's army had crossed the Bidassoa, and was encamped on French territory, threatening Bayonne, Navarre, and the district of Bordeaux.

CHAPTER XLIII

I BEGAN the year 1814 at Mons. Physically, I ran no dangers that year equal to those of its predecessors; but I underwent far greater moral suffering.

All my troopers who were still mounted having remained at Nimeguen, I found at the depôt only men in want of horses. These I was trying to supply from the Ardennes, when the course of events interfered. On January 1, after nearly three months' hesitation, the enemy crossed the Rhine at several points. The two most important were Caub, between Bingen and Coblentz, close to the Lurlei; and Basle, where the Swiss violated their neutrality by throwing open the bridge. They have a way of insisting on or renouncing their neutrality according to their interests of the moment.

The number of the invading troops was reckoned at 500,000 to 600,000. France was exhausted by twenty-five years of war; more than half her soldiers were prisoners in foreign lands, and many of her provinces were ready to break away on the first opportunity; among them, that to which Mons, the capital of the department of Jemmapes, belonged. This broad and rich country, annexed at first to France *de facto* by the war of 1792, and then *de jure* by the Treaty of Amiens, had grown so accustomed to the union that it had distinguished itself after the Russian disaster by the zeal which it displayed in helping the Emperor to restore his army to its former footing, and the willingness with which it complied with all kinds of requisitions. But our losses in Germany had taken heart out of the Belgians, and I found the spirit of the population changed. There was regret for the old paternal government of Austria, and a keen desire for separation from France, and the perpetual wars which were

ruining commerce and industry. In short, Belgium was only awaiting the opportunity to revolt; and owing to her position in rear of the weak army corps which we had on the Rhine, nothing could have been more dangerous for us. The Emperor accordingly sent troops to Brussels under General Maison, a man of ability and solid character.

After visiting various departments he found that that of Jemmapes, and especially the town of Mons, was deeply disaffected. People talked openly of taking men against the weak garrisons; nor could the commandant, General O——, gouty, old, and indolent, as a native of Belgium, besides, afraid of compromising himself in the eyes of his countrymen, have done anything to hinder it. General Maison relieved him of his functions, and appointed me commandant of the department of Jemmapes. It was a difficult duty; for next to the men of Liège, those of Mons and its district are the boldest and most turbulent in all Belgium; while to keep them in check I had only a battalion of 400 recruits, some gendarmes, and 200 dismounted troopers of my own regiment, fifty of whom were natives of those parts. All I could really count on, therefore, were the remaining 150 chasseurs, who, being French by birth, and having all fought under me, would have followed me anywhere. The officers were good; and those of the infantry, especially the major, were perfectly willing to back me up. Yet I could not but see that if we came to blows the odds would be great. From my hotel I could see every day 3,000 or 4,000 peasants and artisans, armed with big sticks, assembling in the square and listening to the talk of certain retired Austrian officers. These men, all wealthy and of good family, had left the service when Belgium was joined to France, and now preached against the Empire, which had loaded them with taxes, carried their children off to the wars, and so forth. This talk found all the readier listeners for being addressed by great landowners to their tenants and persons whom they employed, and over whom they had great influence.

Every day, too, brought news of the enemy's advance from Brussels, driving before them the remnants of Mac-

donald's corps. All French officials left the department to take refuge at Valenciennes and Cambrai. Finally, the mayor of Mons, M. Duval de Beaulieu, felt bound in honour to warn me that I and my small garrison were no longer safe amid the excited populace, and that I had better evacuate the town. No hindrance would be offered, as the regiment had lived on perfectly good terms with the inhabitants. This proposal came, I was aware, from a committee of ex-Austrian officers, and they had sent it through the mayor in the hope of intimidating me. Therefore I determined to show my teeth, and begged M. Duval to summon a meeting of the town council and notables, when I would reply to the proposal he had made. Half an hour later my garrison was under arms; and as soon as the town council, accompanied by the wealthier inhabitants, appeared in the square, I mounted my horse so that all could hear, and, having told the mayor that before talking to him and the council I had an important order to give my troops, I imparted to them the proposal which had been made that we should leave without a fight the town which had been given into our keeping. They were indignant, and said so plainly. I added that no doubt the ramparts were broken down in many places and had no guns, so that it would be difficult to defend them against regular troops; but that if, contrary to the law of nations, the civil population of the town and district rose against us, we need not confine ourselves to the defensive, but should treat them as rebels, and have the right to attack them by every means in our power. I therefore ordered my men to take possession of the belfry, and thence, after half-an-hour's delay and three summons by beat of drum, to fire on the crowd in the square; while patrols were to clear the streets, shooting down especially the country people, who had left their work to make trouble for us. Lastly, I ordered that, fighting once begun, the town was to be set on fire to occupy the inhabitants, and that in order to prevent the flames from being extinguished the men were to keep firing on the burning quarters.

This speech will seem to you pretty brutal; but think of

my critical position. With only 700 men, few of whom had seen any fighting, I was surrounded by a multitude which increased every moment, and the officer in command on the tower told me that all the roads leading to the town were covered with dense masses of colliers from the mines of Jemmapes, making their way to Mons. If I did not act with energy my little band was in danger of being crushed. The nobles who had promoted the rising, and the inhabitants of the town, felt the force of my discourse, and began to withdraw; but the peasants did not stir; so I ordered up two wagons of ammunition and distributed a hundred cartridges to each soldier. Then I gave the order to load, and bade the drums beat the three rolls which were to precede a volley. At the dreaded signal the crowd fled in disorder into the nearest streets, and in a few moments the leaders of the Austrian party, with the mayor at their head, came to shake me by the hand and implore me to spare the town. I agreed on condition that they would instantly order the colliers and workmen to return home. They accepted eagerly; and the young men of fashion who had the best horses galloped out at every gate, met the crowds, and sent them back without any demur to their villages. This ready obedience confirmed my belief that the movement had powerful leaders, and that I and my garrison would soon have been prisoners had I not frightened the promoters by threatening to use all means, even arson, rather than give in to insurgents.

The Belgians are great musicians. That evening there was to be an amateur concert, to which my officers and I, as well as the prefect of the department, were invited. We settled to go as if nothing had happened, and we did rightly; for, so far as appearances went, we were perfectly well received. As we chatted with the leaders of the movement we pointed out to them that the fate of Belgium was to be decided not by the population in rebellion, but by the belligerent armies, and that it would be madness in them to excite labourers and peasants to fight and shed blood in order to hasten by a few days a decision for which they should wait.

An old retired Austrian general, a native of Mons, then

told his fellow-townsmen that they had done very wrong in plotting the capture of the garrison. It would have brought calamity on the town, since soldiers may never surrender without a fight. All admitted the justice of this, and from that day garrison and inhabitants lived on the same good terms as before. A few days later the people of Mons gave us a striking proof of their loyalty, under the following circumstances. As the allied army advanced a crowd of vagabonds, chiefly Prussians, got themselves up like Cossacks, and, urged by the lust of plunder, fell upon everything which had been official property during the French occupation, seizing even without scruple the property of individuals not belonging to the army. A strong band of these pretended Cossacks made their way even to the gates of Brussels and looted the château of Tervueren, carrying off all the horses of the stud which the Emperor had formed there. Then, breaking up into detachments, they went marauding all over Belgium. Coming into the department of Jemmapes, they tried to bring about a rising, and when this did not succeed they thought it was owing to the fact that Mons was deterred from pronouncing for them by the fear which the colonel commanding there had inspired among the people. They determined, therefore, to carry me off or kill me; but in order not to arouse my suspicions by employing too many men on that service, they sent only three hundred. The leader of these partisans must have had good information, for, knowing that I had too few people to guard properly the old gates and half-demolished ramparts, he brought his horsemen close to the town on a dark night, and the greater part of them, dismounting, made their way in silence through the streets in the direction of the Hôtel de la Poste, where I had at first lodged. But since hearing that the enemy had crossed the Rhine I had taken to going every evening to the barracks and passing the night with my troops. It was lucky I did, for the German Cossacks surrounded the hotel, rummaged all the rooms, and in their rage at finding no French officers fell out with the landlord. They ill-treated him, plundered him, and got drunk, men and officers alike, on his best wine.

A Belgian named Courtois, formerly corporal in my regiment, for whom, as one of my best soldiers, I had obtained the Legion of Honour, entered the hotel at that moment. He had lost a leg in Russia in the previous year, and I had been fortunate enough to save his life by procuring for him the means of returning to France. For this he was so grateful that while I was at Mons in the winter of 1814 he often came to see me, on those occasions putting on the uniform of the 23rd Chasseurs, which he had so honourably worn. Now it happened that on the night in question, Courtois, being on his way back to the house of a relation with whom he was staying, saw the enemy's detachment making for the Hôtel de la Poste. Although the brave corporal knew that I no longer stopped there, he wished to make sure that his colonel was not in any danger, and boldly walked into the hotel, taking his relation with him. At the sight of the French uniform and the decoration the Prussians were infamous enough to assault the poor maimed man, and try to tear the cross from his breast. The old soldier tried to defend his decoration; the Prussian Cossacks killed him, dragged his body into the street, and continued their orgies.

In proportion to my weak garrison, Mons was so large that I had fortified myself in the barrack and concentrated my right defence on that point, forbidding my soldiers to go in the direction of the great square. I had been informed that the enemy were there, but I did not know their strength, and feared that the inhabitants might unite with them. But as soon as these latter heard of the murder of their compatriot Courtois, a man esteemed by all the neighbourhood, they resolved to avenge him, and, forgetting for the moment their grudge against the French, they deputed the brother of Courtois and some of the most prominent and bravest among themselves to ask me to put myself at their head and drive out the Cossacks. No doubt the excesses which these people had committed in the hotel made every citizen fear for his own family and house, and had quite as much as the death of Courtois to do with their desire to turn the Cossacks out. They would, no doubt, have acted very differently if regular

troops had entered the town instead of marauders and assassins. Nevertheless, I thought it my duty to profit by the goodwill of the inhabitants, and, taking part of my force, I went towards the square. Meanwhile the infantry major, who knew the town well, went, by my orders, with the remainder, and formed an ambuscade near the breach by which the Prussian Cossacks had got into the place.

At the first shots which our people fired on the scamps the hotel and the square were in a tumult. Those of the enemy who were not killed on the spot made off as fast as their legs would carry them, but a good many lost their way in the streets, and were polished off in detail. As for those who got as far as the spot where they had left their horses fastened to the trees on the promenade, they found the major there, and were received by a volley at close quarters. When day came, we counted, in the town or on the breach, more than 200 of the enemy dead, while we had not lost a single man, for our adversaries were too stupefied by wine and strong drink to be able to defend themselves. Such of them as survived the surprise slipped along the ruins of the old ramparts and made off into the country. There they were all captured or killed by the peasants, who were furious at hearing of the death of poor Courtois. He was regarded as the glory of the neighbourhood; the people called him *wooden-leg*, and he was as dear to them as another wooden-leg, General Daumesnil, was to the people of the Paris suburbs.

I do not quote the combat at Mons as anything to be vain about, for with the National Guards I had 1,200 or 1,400 men, while the Prussian Cossacks were not much more than 300; but I thought I would relate this curious engagement to show how fickle is the spirit of the masses. All the peasants and colliers, who a month before had come in a crowd to exterminate, or at least disarm, the handful of French left in Mons, had now taken sides with them against the Prussians because the Prussians had killed one of their countrymen. I was very sorry, too, for the brave Courtois, who had fallen a victim to his attachment for me. The most important trophy of our victory was the three hundred and odd horses which

the enemy had left in our hands. They came nearly all from the district of Berg, and were very good, so I embodied them in my regiment, for which this unexpected re-mount came very conveniently.

I passed another month at Mons in perfect friendship with the inhabitants, but the advance of the enemy's armies became so serious that the French had to leave not only Brussels, but all Belgium, and re-enter the frontiers of France proper. I was ordered to bring the depôt of my regiment to Cambrai, where, with the horses which we had taken from the Prussian Cossacks, I was able to replace in the ranks three hundred good troopers returned from Leipzig, and thus to form two fine squadrons, which, under Major Sigaldi, were shortly sent to the army which the Emperor had assembled in Champagne. They attracted notice there, and sustained the credit of the 23rd Chasseurs, particularly at the battle of Champaubert, where Captain Duplessis was killed.

I have always had a great predilection for the lance, a terrible weapon in the hands of a good horseman. I therefore obtained permission to distribute to my squadrons the lances which the artillery officers could not bring away when they evacuated the Rhine fortresses. So well were they appreciated that several other cavalry regiments also asked for them, and were glad to have got them.

The regimental depôts being obliged to move to the left bank of the Seine to avoid falling into hands of the enemy, mine went to Nogent-le-Roi. We had a good number of troopers, but scarcely any horses. The Government was making great efforts to collect some at Versailles, where a central cavalry depôt had been created under the command of General Préval. Like his predecessor, General Bourcier, he understood the details of organisation much better than war, of which he had seen very little. He discharged his difficult duty very well; but as he could not improvise horses or equipments, and was particular about not sending out any but well-organised detachments, they went off very slowly. I groaned over this, but no colonel could join the army without an order from the Emperor, and, to economise his resources

he had forbidden any more officers to be sent to the war than were proportionate to the number of men that they had to command. In vain, therefore, did I beg General Préval to let me go to Champagne; he fixed my departure for the end of March, at which date I was to join the army with a so-called 'marching' regiment, composed of mounted men from my depôt and some others. Till then I was allowed to reside at Paris with my family; for my lieutenant-colonel, M. Caseneuve, could command and organise the 200 men who were still at Nogent-le-Roi, and I could always inspect them in a few hours. In Paris therefore I passed most of the month of March, one of the saddest times of my life, although I was with those who were dearest to me. But the Imperial Government to which I was attached, and which I had so long defended at the cost of my blood, was crumbling on all sides. From Lyons the enemy's armies occupied a great part of France, and it was easy to see that they would soon reach the capital.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE strongest opponents of the Emperor are compelled to admit that in the winter campaign of the first three months of 1814 he surpassed himself. Never did general display such talents or do so much with such feeble resources. With a few thousand men, a great part of whom were untried recruits, he made head against all the armies of Europe; showing a front in every direction with the same troops, whom he carried about with a marvellous rapidity. Making clever use of the defensive resources of the country, he flew from Austrians to Russians, from Russians to Prussians; from Blucher back to Schwarzenberg and Sachen, sometimes repulsed, but more often victorious. There was even at one moment a hope of chasing the strangers out of French territory. One more effort on the part of the nation would have done it; but there was a wide-spread weariness of war, and conspiracies against the Empire everywhere, especially at Paris. Several military writers have expressed surprise that France did not rise as in 1792 to repel the invaders, or at least form, like the Spaniards, a focus of national defence in every province. To this the answer is, that twenty-five years of war, and the conscription too frequently anticipated, had worn out the enthusiasm which in 1792 had improvised armies. In most departments only old men and boys remained. The example of Spain does not apply to France. Paris has been allowed to gain too much influence, and unless she puts herself at the head of the movement, France is helpless. In Spain, on the other hand, each province, being a little government, could act and raise an army, even when the French held Madrid. France was ruined by centralisation.

It forms no part of my plan to relate the feats of the French army in the campaign of 1814. One would have to write volumes and notice all that has been published on the subject; nor have I the heart to dwell on the misfortunes of my country. I will only say, therefore, that after disputing every foot of the ground between the Marne, the Aube, the Saône, and the Seine, the Emperor devised a great scheme which must have saved France if it had succeeded. This was to march upon Lorraine and Alsace, by Saint-Dizier and Vitry, thereby threatening the enemy's rear, and alarming him for his communications, and thus forcing him to retire to the frontier while he could. But two conditions were needed to bring this superb strategic movement to a good issue, and these were not satisfied. They were loyalty on the part of the great state officials, and some means of preventing the enemy from marching on Paris in case he took no notice of the Emperor's march on his rear. Unhappily the loyalty of the Chambers had been so weakened that it was their principal members, Talleyrand, the Duke of Dalberg, and others who secretly kept the allied sovereigns informed of the disaffection of the upper classes, and invited them to attack the capital. As regards defences, I must confess that sufficient provision had not been made. The gates on the right bank had been palisaded, but no works thrown up to contain cannon. The garrison, consisting of a few line troops, pensioners, and *Polytechnique* students, was insufficient even to attempt resistance; so that on leaving the capital in January the Emperor had entrusted the defence of Paris to the National Guard. The officers of that citizen militia had met at the Tuileries, and replied after their wont by many oaths and warlike declarations to the Emperor's ardent discourse. He named the Empress regent, and appointed as lieutenant-general in chief command his brother Joseph, the ex-King of Spain, the best of men, and the most unmilitary.

Deluding himself with the belief that the safety of the capital was thus provided for, Napoleon thought that he might safely leave it to its own resources for a few days, while he carried out his plan of attacking the enemy's rear,

and started for Lorraine towards the end of March. But he had marched only a few days when he learnt that, instead of pursuing him, the allies were making for Paris, driving before them the weak remains of Marmont's and Mortier's corps; and that these, with but small aid from the National Guard, were trying to defend the heights of Montmartre. His eyes opened by this news, Napoleon led his columns back at once towards Paris.

By March 30, travelling rapidly and unescorted, he had passed Moret when he heard the sound of guns, and hoped then to enter the capital before the allies. His presence would have produced a great effect on the people, who were asking for arms; but though there were plenty in store, Clarke would not allow them to be served out. On reaching Fromenteau, five leagues only from Paris, Napoleon heard the guns no longer, and knew that the city was in the power of the enemy. At Villejuif this was confirmed; and, in fact, Marmont had just signed the capitulation. The Empress and her son, the King of Rome, had, on the approach of danger, been removed to Blois, and Joseph soon followed them. The troops evacuated Paris by the Fontainebleau gate, on the road by which the Emperor was expected.

It is impossible to give any idea of the agitation which prevailed. Few of the inhabitants had foreseen an invasion; and as for me, who had expected it, and had seen the horrors of war so near, I was in great trouble to know where I could place my wife and little child in safety. The kind old Marshal Sérurier offered them shelter at the Invalides, of which he was governor, and I was calmed by the thought that as the French had always respected the places where old soldiers lived, the enemy would do the same. So I took my family there, and left Paris before the allies entered. I reported myself to General Préval at Versailles, and he put me in command of a small column formed of troopers from my own regiment and from the 9th and 12th Chasseurs, with orders to rendezvous the same day at Rambouillet. There I found my horses and outfit, and took the command of my squadrons.

The road was covered with the carriages of persons leaving the capital. This did not surprise me; but I could not understand whence came the great number of troops of different arms who arrived from all sides in detachments large enough, if combined, to have formed a body capable of stopping the enemy before Montmartre, and gaining time for our army to come up from Champagne. But the Emperor, misled by his War Minister, had given no orders on this point, and probably did not know that he still had such means of defence remaining. The following statement of what these were is from official documents. At Vincennes, the *École militaire*, and the central artillery depôt were 400 guns and over 50,000 new muskets. Joseph and Clarke had at their disposal the troops brought by Marshals Mortier and Marmont, to the number of 19,000; 7,000 or 8,000 soldiers in the barracks of Paris; 3,000 at the depôts of the imperial guard; 15,000 to 18,000 dismounted troopers in Versailles and the neighbourhood; 18,000 to 20,000 recruits intended for the line regiments, and National Guards in the barracks of the villages round Paris; more than 2,000 officers on leave or retired who came to offer their services; and lastly, 20,000 workmen, nearly all old soldiers, who begged to be allowed to aid in the defence of Paris: in all, an effective strength of 80,000 men, who could have been got together in a few hours and made use of to defend the capital till Napoleon and his army could come up.

Joseph and Clarke got warning of the approach of the enemy on the morning of March 28, and thus had forty-eight hours in which to make use of these resources, but took no steps to do so. Finally, to crown their bungling, they sent 4,000 of the best men in the imperial guard out of Paris to reinforce the already needlessly numerous escort of the Empress, at the moment when the enemy was attacking Romainville.

As soon as Napoleon learnt that Paris had capitulated, and that the two small corps of Marmont and Mortier were withdrawing to join him, he ordered them to take up a position at Essonnes, half-way between Paris and Fontaine-

bleau, and went himself to the latter town as the heads of the columns returned from Saint-Dizier were reaching it, which shows that his intention was to march on Paris. The enemy's generals have since admitted that if the Emperor had attacked them, they would not have dared to accept battle. Behind them was the Seine, and Paris with its million inhabitants, who might rise during the battle, barricade the streets and bridges, and cut off their retreat. They had, therefore, determined to retire, and encamp on the heights of Belleville, Montmartre, and Chaumont, which command the right bank of the Seine and the road to Germany.

But fresh events detained them in Paris. M. de Talleyrand, once a bishop, now married, had been to all appearance most devotedly attached to the Emperor, who had made him Prince of Benevento, Grand Chamberlain, and so on. But his pride was hurt at being no longer Napoleon's first confidant and director of his policy, and he had, since the disastrous Russian campaign, put himself at the head of the smothered opposition set up by the malcontents of all parties, and especially the aristocracy of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. In the days of his prosperity they had submitted to and even served Napoleon; now they were his enemies, and without openly compromising themselves, attacked him by all available means. The chiefs were such men as the Abbé de Pradt, Archbishop of Malines, M. de Chateaubriand, M. Laisné, and others, all able men, who, directed by Talleyrand, the ablest intriguer of them all, had for some time been looking out for a chance of upsetting Napoleon. They saw that they would never have one more favourable than the present. But though Napoleon was at the moment greatly weakened, he was not quite beaten. Besides the army which had just done such wonders under him, there were Suchet's between the Pyrenees and the Garonne, numerous troops under Soult, and two fine divisions at Lyons. The Army of Italy was still formidable; and thus, though the English were in occupation of Bordeaux, Napoleon could still collect a large force and prolong the war indefinitely if he raised

the population, whom the enemy's requisitions had exasperated.

M. de Talleyrand and his party saw that if they allowed the Emperor time to bring up all these troops to Paris, he might beat the allies in the streets, or retire to the loyal provinces and continue the war till he tired the enemy into making peace. The government must be changed. But there was the difficulty. They wanted to restore the Bourbons, while part of the nation wished to leave Napoleon on the throne, or call his son to it. There was the same difference of opinion among the allies; the Kings of England and Prussia being on the side of the Bourbons, while the Emperor of Russia, who never liked them, was disposed to support the interests of Napoleon's son.

In order to settle the question by taking the first step, and as it were to force the hand of the allied sovereigns, Talleyrand caused a score of young aristocrats to appear on horseback on the Place Louis XV. wearing white cockades. Led by Viscount Talon, an old comrade of mine, from whom I have the details, they made their way towards the Emperor Alexander's hotel, loudly shouting, 'Long live Louis XVIII.! Down with the tyrant!' At first the bystanders were merely stupefied; presently the crowd began to threaten, and the most resolute members of the cavalcade wavered. The first outburst of royalism had missed fire, but they repeated the scene at various points. Sometimes they were hooted, sometimes applauded. The Parisians required a cry to arouse them, and that which Talon and his friends had started resounded all day in the ears of the Emperor Alexander. In the evening Talleyrand was able to say to him, 'Your Majesty can judge for yourself with what unanimity the country desires the restoration of the Bourbons.' From that moment, though Napoleon's partisans, as the events of the next year showed, were many more than those of Louis XVIII., his cause was lost.

EPILOGUE

GENERAL MARBOT'S 'Memoirs' end with the first abdication of Napoleon, so that we lose what we would gladly have had —his reminiscences of the Elba and Waterloo period; though a few letters exist giving some scanty details with regard to the Waterloo campaign. From an article by M. Cuvillier-Fleury, published in the 'Journal des Débats' shortly after the general's death, we learn that at the first Restoration he was maintained in the army, and placed in command of the 7th Hussars. As might be expected when Napoleon returned, Marbot and his regiment went back to their former allegiance, and at Waterloo they formed part of the corps under the Count of Erlon; being posted on the extreme right of the French line. On April 10 he had written:

> I have to guard the line from Mouchin to Chéreng. It is not much trouble to do, for the English do not stir, and are as quiet at Tournay as if they were in London. I think that everything will pass off peaceably.

Writing from Saint-Amand in the following month, he still reports all quiet; the enemy's troops deserting in heaps; men flocking 'thick as flies' to the French regiments. 'People think there will be no fighting. Here we think that almost certain.'

By June 13 the complexion of affairs is changed, and he writes from Pont-sur-Sambre: 'I do not think there will be a battle for another five days'—a very accurate forecast. After the affair of June 17 at Genappe, Marbot was promoted major-general; but this appointment did not take effect. The following letter, written on June 26 from Laon, gives Marbot's fresh impressions of Waterloo:

I cannot get over our defeat. We were manœuvred like so many pumpkins. I was with my regiment on the right flank of the army almost throughout the battle. They assured me that Marshal Grouchy would come up at that point; and it was guarded only by my regiment with three guns and a battalion of infantry—not nearly enough. Instead of Grouchy, what arrived was Blucher's corps. You can imagine how we were served. We were driven in, and in an instant the enemy was on our rear. The mischief might have been repaired, but no one gave any orders. The big generals were making bad speeches at Paris; the small ones lose their heads, and all goes wrong. I got a lance-wound in the side; it is pretty severe, but I thought I would stay to set a good example. If everyone had done the same we might yet get along; but the men are deserting, and no one stops them. Whatever people may say, there are 50,000 men in this neighbourhood who might be got together; but to do it we should have to make it a capital offence to quit your post, or to give leave of absence. Everybody gives leave, and the coaches are full of officers departing. You may judge if the soldiers stay. There will not be one left in a week, unless they are checked by the death penalty. The Chambers can save us if they like; but we must have severe measures and prompt action. No food is sent to us, and so the soldiers pillage our poor France as if they were in Russia. I am at the outposts, before Laon; we have been made to promise not to fire, and all is quiet.

In a letter written fifteen years later to General E. de Grouchy, Marbot enters more into detail. From this we learn that his regiment formed part of the force which was thrown back *en potence* on the extreme right, fronting the stream of the Dyle, as may be seen in any plan of the battle. The Emperor's instructions, conveyed to him by his old comrade Labédoyère, who was then acting as aide-de-camp to Napoleon, were, while keeping the bulk of his force in view of the field of battle, to push forward his outposts towards Saint-Lambert and Ottignies; leaving a line of cavalry pickets a quarter of a league apart one from the other, so that when Grouchy arrived the news might be passed along without delay. One of these detachments reached Moustier about 1 P.M., and the officer in command at once

sent back word that the French troops posted on the right bank of the Dyle were crossing the river—i.e. falling back. This intelligence was forwarded to the Emperor, and an orderly officer soon came with orders to Marbot to push as far as possible in the direction of Wavre. Near Saint-Lambert one of his sections fell in with some Prussian cavalry, capturing an officer and a few men. These were promptly sent to the Emperor, and Marbot hastened with a squadron towards Saint-Lambert. There he saw a strong column advancing, and again sent intelligence to headquarters. But the reply was that it could be nothing but Grouchy; that the prisoners were doubtless some Prussian stragglers flying before his advance, and that Marbot might go forward boldly. Of course he had to obey orders; but soon had proof positive as to the nature of the advancing column. After hard fighting he had to retire, again reporting the circumstances to the Emperor. So possessed, however, was Napoleon with his own view of the case, that he merely sent back the adjutant with orders to Marbot 'to let Grouchy know.' By this time his outposts were all falling back, and soon he was closely engaged with the English left, near Frischermont, and received the wound which he mentions in the letter already quoted. A report which he drew up later in the year at the instance of Davout, then Minister of War, has unfortunately disappeared.

After Waterloo, Marbot had to leave France; and during the period of his exile, which he spent in Germany, he composed the work by which until the appearance of the present Memoirs he was best known—a criticism on General Rogniart's 'Considérations sur l'Art de la Guerre.' It was this which earned the flattering reference to him, accompanying a legacy of 100,000 francs, in Napoleon's will. 'I bid Colonel Marbot,' he says, 'continue to write in defence of the glory of the French armies, and to the confusion of calumniators and apostates.' (Rogniart had criticised the conduct of the Essling campaign, as Marbot mentions on pp. 438, 439, of the first volume.)

In 1818 Marbot was recalled to France and placed on

half-pay. He occupied his leisure by writing another book, 'On the Necessity of Increasing the Military Forces of France,' which was well thought of. Presently his services were again in request, and in 1829 he was placed in command of the 8th Chasseurs. In the following year he became aide-de-camp to the Duke of Orleans, and a second time attained the rank of major-general. From that time till the fall of the monarchy 'of July' he was constantly employed. He received one more wound, when he was nearly sixty years old. During the Medeah expedition in Algiers he was hit by a a bullet in the left knee. As he was being carried to the rear, he remarked with a smile to the Duke: 'This is your fault, sir.' 'How so?' naturally said the Duke. 'Did I not hear you say, before the fighting began, that if any of your staff got wounded, you could bet it would be Marbot? You see you have won!' On the death of the Duke in 1842, he was attached to the staff of the Count of Paris, then a child of four years old; a post which at all events may have kept the veteran out of danger. In 1848 he was placed for the last time on the retired list; and in November 1854 his honourable life came to an end. Few men of that age seem to have left a more creditable record.

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